



2nd. 夢囚われる戦姫

Kyohoei Iwai

岩井恭平



# ムシウタ

MU SHI - UTA  
bug

角川スニーカー文庫

# Novel Illustrations



# ムシウタ

MU SHI-UTA

bug

2nd.夢囚われる戦姫



岩井恭平

MUSHI-VTA bug

もし、また会えた時は……  
最高の夢を、あたしに聞かせてくれる？

05. 夢囚われる戦姫



MVSHI-VTA bug

いくら友達でも——  
言葉にしなくちゃ分からないことがあるの♡

06.夢離れゆく誓い

MVSHI-VTA bug



でも、あたしたちは  
あの日のように、もう戻れない——

02. 夢映す波紋



俺が世界を変えて、  
アイツとの約束を果たしてやる——



08. 夢焦がす魔人



M U

S H I -

U T A

bug

2nd.夢囚われる戦姫



## 薬屋大助

Daisuke Kusuriya



ホルス聖城学園に現れた少年。“虫憑き”について調査しているらしいがその正体は不明。

## 花城摩理

Mari Hanashiro



亜梨子の親友。病に冒され死ぬ直前に、ある理由から亜梨子にモルフォチョウを託す。

## 一之黒亜梨子

Arisu Ichinokuro



ホルス聖城学園中等部2年生。旧家の伝統に従い武術全般をたたき込まれた、戦うお嬢様。



Characters of  
**MUSHIUTA**  
bug



**MUSHIUTA bug  
2nd.  
contents**

05.夢囚われる戦姫—007

06.夢離れゆく誓い—069

07.夢映す波紋——120

08.夢焦がす魔人——165

あとがき——268



# Episode 05. The Dream-Enraptured Valkyrie

A full moon hung in the sky.

It was as if the rain that fell just a few hours ago was a lie. The starry sky seemed to hold a magical charm that stole her eyes. To pass on on a night like this probably feels not bad—that was how nice it felt like to her.

Gradually, a shadow was borne from the centre of the round moon.

It was a Morpho butterfly which released a silver radiance.

The Morpho butterfly slowly descended and eventually landed on the crutch she was holding. Its then morphed, turning into feelers that fused with her body and the crutch. She could feel her weak body being revitalised with strength.

*—Just because you are afraid of dying alone, how many people do you think you've dragged along?*

At that voice, the girl turned her gaze from the full moon to the ground.

She was surrounded by a group of people, each commanding a Mushi of different outline.

The voice had come from one of them. It belonged to a girl that was around the same age as herself, but had a liveliness to her which she did not. Next to her was a small Mushi. It resembled a ladybird with seven red spots on its scraggy body.

*—I don't have much time.....*

Her lips moved by themselves. The spear fused with the Morpho butterfly released an intense glow as if in threat, causing the Mushitsuki encircling her to take a step back in caution.

*—If you're going to get in my way, I'll just kill all of your Mushi. Just like how I've done so thus far.....*

As she spoke, she suddenly felt strength sapping away from her legs rapidly.

An overpowering sense of lethargy drained away all her strength, irregardless of her fusion with the Mushi.

She immediately placed a hand on the wall to support herself. Looking down on the mirror-like surface of the puddle on the ground which displayed the full moon, she could see the pained expression on her face clearly.

The face reflected in the puddle was not hers—it was not Ichinokuro Arisu's.

The face which stared back wide-eyed.

She recognised whose it was.

Hanashiro Mari.

The face that was reflected in the puddle smiled back at her.

—*Arisu..... you will listen to my request, right?*

The Mari reflected on the water surface that was Arisu but not herself seemed to say that to her.

The piercing sun rays and the chirping of birds streamed through the paper sliding door.

“.....”

Arisu raised her upper body from the futon and thoughtlessly straightened her messy bed hair.

“.....What a strange dream.”

Today was Sunday.

It was the day when she would go to a certain location with the youth who lodged in her house.



# Part 1

“You’ll definitely regret and complain that you shouldn’t have gone.”

The youth walking next to her grumbled with a sigh.

His name was Kusuriya Daisuke. He was the same age as Arisu and attended Horusu Seijou Academy Middle School in the same class as her. His facial features and hairstyle were nothing but ordinary, and even his appearance in usual wear seemed like it was designed to blend into the background. The only thing that could be said to be his defining characteristic was the plaster on his cheek.

“What do you mean I’ll regret. You can’t stop me with that kind of threat.”

On the other hand, Arisu’s appearance was contrastingly eye-catching. Her long hair was tied to her back and she wore an extravagant order-made coat. Even with her petite figure, her pompous attitude made her extremely conspicuous everywhere she went.

An out-of-season butterfly danced above the heads of the two. It was a Morpho butterfly with brilliantly shining wings.

They were walking along an ordinary residential district. Seeing as they were getting further away from the city centre, they must be heading to the outskirts of Akamaki City.

In counter to Arisu’s high spirits, Daisuke’s face was covered in gloom.

“In order to quicken with the investigation of Hanashiro Mari, I even arranged for another observer to replace me, but..... you really need to reign in your wilfulness.”

“The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau..... the underground organisation created for the purpose of managing Mushitsuki. This is a chance for me to enter their secretive hideout! How can I possibly miss out on that!”

“I’m begging you, just don’t cause any uproar over there. Keep in mind my condition for bringing you along.”

“I know that already, stop harping on it. ....So, what’s the emergency mission? It’s for that reason that you were relieved from monitoring me today, right?”

She stared at him with sparkling eyes, only drawing a deep sigh from him with a sour look.

There was a reason why Daisuke was living with Arisu.

The ordinary-at-first-glance middle schooler, Kusuriya Daisuke first met her a month ago.

*Mushi*—an existence that infests youths and feed on their hopes and dreams in order to grow. Nobody knew when rumours about them first started being whispered around, but presently, those infested by Mushi, the *Mushitsuki* are widely abhorred.

The official stance by the government is that Mushi does not exist, but Arisu knows the truth.

That is because, the Morpho butterfly fluttering above her head currently is none other a Mushi.

The Morpho butterfly’s original host was Arisu’s close friend, Hanashiro Mari. However, it had not disappeared even after the death of its sick-ridden host one year ago, and currently follows Arisu. To find out why did the Morpho butterfly follow her, and also Mari’s dying wish, Arisu set out to search for other Mushitsuki.

And then, she finally found a Mushitsuki apart from Mari. However, that was when Kusuriya Daisuke interposed. He belonged to the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau—the SEPB in short, a governmental organisation that captures and isolates Mushitsuki in order uphold the stance that ‘Mushitsuki do not exist’. After a series of events, Daisuke became an observer to Arisu, an ‘irregularity’, and had to stay by her side closely at all times.

“It’s to convince the captured Mushitsuki.”

Walking ahead of her, Daisuke spoke.

“Convince..... in order words, to get them to join the SEPB? Like that time with Neiko-san?”

“Yea.”

Neiko referred to a Mushitsuki that Arisu met the other day. She had been apprehended by Daisuke and was to have her Mushi killed originally. But, she had agreed to SEPB’s terms and joined them in order to avoid that.

“Hmm. But, why do they have to ask you to do it specifically? Can’t it be done by others?”

“Fight fire with fire, to neutralise a monster, just pit another monster against it, it’s probably something like that.”

“A monster.....?”

With that, Daisuke was silent.

They came to a stop before a white three storeys building. There was a dirty-looking nameplate attached to the rusted gate.

“Akamaki City Folklore Museum?”

Arisu read the words on the plate out loud and raised her head to look at the building. It was a simple rectangular building without decorations.

“Ah, wait for me, Daisuke.....!”

Daisuke just walked through the ajar gate and entered the premises. Arisu followed after him in a hurry.

He pushed opened the door and entered the building.

Inside, there was a staircase, an elevator, a glass window which acted as the reception and a pathway which leads to rooms further inside. Arisu thought that there was nobody around this floor, but a figure appeared from beyond the pathway just then.

It was a young woman dressed in a suit, most likely an employee here.

“Hii.....!”



The woman had let out a shriek unknowingly when she saw them and cowered her body.

Looking at her reaction, Arisu realised.

*—This person knows that Daisuke is a Mushitsuki.....!*

At a glance from Daisuke, the woman immediately turned to her back and ran down the passage.

“Hey, just now that person.....”

“She’s the liaison here.”

Pressing the button for the elevator, he flashed a sardonic smile.

“She was probably in the midst of changing shift, but she had bad luck. Normally, she’d be behind the bulletproof door, observing us through the monitor without coming into contact with us directly at all.”

“Liaison? Monitor?”

“You didn’t notice whatsoever? There’s cameras everywhere in the foreyard and throughout this building.”

The elevator door opened before the speechless Arisu.

The moment they entered the elevator, Daisuke reached into his shirt. He retrieved a pair of goggles hidden at his back and put them on.

The piece of SEPB equipment was big enough to cover half of his face. A red spot flashed on the display surface.

“By the way, I heard that this elevator has a mechanism that vents poison gas if anything happens. I have no idea if it’s true or not though.”

“P-poison gas.....?”

“Don’t call me by my name from here onwards. Members of the surveillance team are forbidden from even revealing their real names.”

The elevator moved.

*—We’re moving underground?*

Experiencing lightness of her body, Arisu surmised that they were not moving

upwards. However, there were only floors 1 to 3 on the lift display.

Seeing the silent Arisu, Daisuke scoffed.

“Ha, already getting the cold feet, are you. Usually acting so tough, it sure didn’t take you long to chicken out—”

*“Arisu Final Attack~!”*

“.....!”

Daisuke clutched his shin that was kicked powerfully by Arisu.

She wondered how far down they had gone. Without making a sound, the elevator door opened.

A huge platform spread before their eyes.

Below and ahead of the platform was a tunnel that led into darkness. There were railway tracks on the floor of the tunnel and two trains stopped at the platform. Daisuke headed for the closer one.

“Hey, is there no one around? Not even security guards?”

“There’s no way there would anyone around.”

“Why is that so?”

“Because there’s no one who’d want to get close to Mushitsuki, even if it’s for their job.”

In front of Arisu who furrowed her eyebrows, Daisuke’s goggles lighted up again.

The door to the train opened.

There were only two rows of seats facing each other inside. The moment they boarded, the sound of gasps could be heard.

There were prior riders in the train. They were a group with both sexes wearing different clothes from Daisuke, but a similar-looking goggles covered their faces as well. From their statures, they seemed to be around Arisu’s age.

All of them looked at the two—no, they were looking at Daisuke in shock.

Whispers of, ‘T-that guy is.....!’, and, ‘Why is he in Akamaki City.....’ could be

heard. They moved further into the train as if trying to distance themselves from Arisu and Daisuke who sat close to the train door.

“H-hey, Daisuke..... are they also.”

“They’re Mushitsuki.”

The train moved with a jerk and started accelerating.

“I understand that ordinary people like the one we saw at the building would be afraid when they see Mushitsuki, but..... why are these people scared of us too. Even though they’re fellow Mushitsuki.”

“Ah, it’s the same thing.”

Daisuke smiled with a grin and looked at the Mushitsuki sitting further inside. Just by doing so, their shoulders trembled in surprise and they averted their eyes from him.

“No matter who it is, anybody would be afraid of monsters, that’s all.”

“.....?”

Daisuke gave a simple explanation about how the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau worked to Arisu.

It appears that those people belonged to the jurisdiction of the Central Headquarters based in Akamaki City. However, Daisuke belonged to the East Central Branch which is situated in the east, at Ouka City. In addition, the SEPB ranks Mushitsuki based on their level of risk, and he was apparently quite highly ranked in this regard. The fact that other Mushitsuki fear Daisuke stemmed from these reasons.

“What’s with that. Are you actually someone that amazing? I couldn’t have imagined that from seeing how you that got all that flustered just because Ena and Takako hugged you.”

“S-shut up.”

“If you’re from another branch, not to mention so highly regarded, then how come you were sent to monitor me?”

“Like hell I’d know. That’s what I want to know as well—”



Saying so, he came to a start. He looked down as he mumbled in thought, 'now that you mentioned it, this is definitely strange. Why is it.....'

The train came to a stop.

"Are we there? What is this place.....?"

"We're somewhere deep underneath Akamaki City, that's all I know. The only ways to come here from the surface are the train we took here, and the exits used exclusively by the employees. Apart from those, there's only the vents for ventilation, I guess. ....More importantly."

Daisuke stared intently at Arisu and spoke.

"I'll say this for the last time, prepare yourself. Because you're definitely going to regret coming here."

"B-bring it on!"

With those words, Arisu got off the train.

## Part 2

After alighting from the train, Arisu and Daisuke proceeded down separate passageways.

The lightings placed at regular intervals reflected off the metallic walls. The long passageway that Arisu entered did not have a single door apart from the one she entered from.

[Please proceed forwards and stop before the wall.]

She could hear a machine-like female voice coming from somewhere.

Arisu did as she was told and advanced. The small surveillance camera on the ceiling tracked her and slowly rotated as she walked.

When she reached the end of the passageway, she stopped. There was no door handle nor buttons, only a blank wall.

[Pulse and breathing are normal. Please stand by in the entrance room until the signal is given.]

The wall slid to the side, revealing a small hidden room.

There was another door with the same design as the one she entered through, as well as a large door and three exits. There was a poorly maintained bench by the side of the wall and several people dressed in clothes that seemed to be sewn from rags sat there.

Before the large door stood two people. They were clad in long coats with excessive belts and large goggles that covered the face—either of which were what Daisuke wore during his missions except they were white in colour.

“Sit down and wait for your turn.”

The man in white coat instructed Arisu.

At his commandeering tone, she felt indignant. However, she recalled

Daisuke's words to 'behave herself' and sat down on the seat.

"Hey, is this the entrance room? What do you mean by turn?"

"Shut your mouth."

The man fully clothed in white cut her off callously. A vein popped up on Arisu's forehead.

"Bear with it, bear with it..... I'll just let all this annoyance out on Daisuke later....."

[Subject 2587 shall enter the room for the inspection and adjustment of their safety choker.]

The other smaller door similar to the one Arisu entered from opened.

"....."

What appeared completely stole Arisu's gaze.

It wasn't just her. Everyone in the entrance room—even the guards in white coat, turned towards the door.

A girl dressed in thin clothing stood there.

She was more beautiful than anyone Arisu met before.

Her age was around that of Arisu's. She had a well-featured face, but what caught Arisu's attention the most was her powerful gaze that held a strong sense of presence and an unbendable will.

However, something about the girl seemed to catch Arisu's mind; it felt as though she recognised her from somewhere.

The girl entered the room expressionlessly. Arisu noticed the silvery chain wrapped her neck as she unreservedly took a seat nearby. A metallic plate was attached to the chains with a red light lit up on the surface.

Furthermore, both of her arms were bounded by restraints. The tough-looking restraints were joined together by a long wire. There should be no trouble for her to walk normally, but it would be impossible for her to spread her arms wide open.

The beauty of the girl stood in contrast to her prisoner-like appearance. Even



this mismatch seemed to magnify her otherworldly gorgeousness.

The girl sat down next to Arisu. Even after she sat down, Arisu could not tear her eyes off her. She looked back at Arisu.

“.....”

The two of them stared into each other in close proximity.

“.....What is it, is there something on my face?”

Arisu must have been staring too hard at her, as her face turned stiff. The unapproachable aura around the girl dissipated.

Arisu looked at her unblinkingly.

“Notwithstanding your face..... you have a choker and a pair of arm restraints on.”

“Indeed, I guess so.”

“Why do you have such things on?”

At Arisu’s question, the girl had a look of surprise for some reason, but that immediately turned into a grin. It was a smile that seem unbecoming for someone like her, yet it suited her more than anything else.

“You must be here for the first time.”

Arisu nodded.

[Subject 5987. Please put on the safety choker.]

A space appeared in the wall. The white coated personnel took out a pair of arm restraints and a chain from within, the same as that worn by the girl.

One of the people seated stood up and had the choker and restraints put on by the people in the white coats. The large door then opened, and another white coated personnel on the other side took him away.

“These are the so-called safety apparatus. That is, to them..... in the eyes of SEPB.”

“Safety apparatus?”

“These things are remote-controlled and are set to be able to send a jolt of

electricity at any time. The moment you show the slightest trace of suspicious behaviour, they can send an electric shock to render you unconscious. Well, it's like an insurance against Mushitsuki."

She tilted her neck, showing Arisu the chains. In contrast to the gravity of her words, her expression was bright.

"Without such things, they'd be too scared to be in the same room as Mushitsuki. Jeez, even if they call themselves the SEPB, they're just a gathering of cowards."

More so than the anger she felt towards the SEPB's treatment of Mushitsuki, Arisu was more attracted to the girl's spontaneous changes in expression.

She went from giving a lecture in an exaggerated manner, to sneering at the SEPB, and then nodding to herself in satisfaction. Her wealth of emotions made Arisu think that she would be terrifying were she to be mad.

She looked towards Arisu abruptly.

"Hey, what is your dream?"

"Eh?"

Being asked all of a sudden, Arisu could not respond.

"If you're unwilling, you don't have to tell me....."

Saying that, she smiled.

*My dream—.*

She had met Mari, followed by Daisuke, and many other more Mushitsuki since then. In doing so, she had come to know of their dreams.

However, when she tried to think of one herself, she realised that she could not give an immediate answer.

"Because I'm not a Mushitsuki, I....."

Arisu spoke.

The girl slightly raised her eyebrows. She must have thought that Arisu was also a Mushitsuki.

“It doesn’t matter whether or not you are a Mushitsuki! It can just be something that you want to do, or perhaps just something that you want. Don’t you think that it is marvellous to have something like that?”

Raising her index finger, the girl spoke excitedly. That out-of-place dazzling smile almost seemed to overwhelm Arisu.

“Wha-..... What is your dream?”

“Me? My dream is..... to build a place of belonging for Mushitsuki.”

“A place of belonging..... for Mushitsuki?”

“Even though they are feared by society, and even their loved ones avoid them for some of them..... not to mention that they have something unknown lurking within themselves, they are actually no different from any ordinary person. Or rather, I feel like Mushitsuki are even more vulnerable than ordinary people. Though they may occasionally hurt other people, they are the ones getting hurt most of the time..... I want to create a place of belonging where such Mushitsuki are able to smile from the bottom of their hearts. At the very least, it should not be a place like this, where their every move is monitored.”

Her words resonated clearly in every corner of the quiet room. Even the people seated and the white coated guards seem to have heard the words spun by the girl.

“It’s the same for you guys, right? There’s no way you enjoy monitoring the very same Mushitsuki as yourselves.”

The girl looked towards the guards. Arisu could see that the two of them were biting their lips.

“I will definitely create that place. When that happens, you will not need to fear the SEPB like this any longer. Just wait for me until then.”

Unlike the brightly smiling girl, it was obvious that the men in white coat were shaken. Even the thinly-clothed people hanging their head previously were filled with spirit now.

*This girl..... she’s different from all the other Mushitsuki I’ve met so far—.*

Arisu was once again awed by the charm and charisma held by the girl. Her



words were not merely an idealistic argument, it held a definite persuasiveness to it.

“Even so, I know that this is not a dream that can be realised so easily.”

Exhaling a breath, the girl looked down on her arms that are restrained.

“Starting with the SEPB, there are many other challenges that Mushitsuki face..... The fact that I am imprisoned here also mean that I am powerless. However, I will make it come true by any means. I will keep on fighting, and resisting, even if I were to die someday. In doing so.....”

When she raised her head, there was a smile on her face.

“Surely, my wish would reach somebody. Hey, don’t you think so? That no matter whom, their dreams will definitely connect with someone else somewhere.”

Saying so happily, the girl swung her legs. Unlike when she entered the room, this gesture seemed to express the youthfulness in her.

“Ah, there’s one more thing in addition that. Something that I want to do.”

The girl said, as if just remembering it.

“I want to know just what are the Mushi. Why do they exist and why do they consume the dreams of the Mushitsuki?”

Arisu jerked in surprise.

“I’m—”

Arisu unthinkingly grasped the girl’s hand.

“I’m the same! I want to know about the Mushi..... why does Mushitsuki exists. And also, why—”

*Why did Mari become a Mushitsuki*—Arisu’s words became stuck in her throat just when she was about to vocalise them. She thought that the girl wouldn't understand what she was talking about even if she spoke about it.

The girl flashed a mischievous smile.

“Then, how about we go find out? The two of us, together.”

“.....Eh?”

“Just kidding.”

Perhaps recalling her current situation, the girl gave a lonely sigh. But, she looked joyful seeing her grasped hands.

“Even though I mentioned this earlier, it’s not going to be an easy task. In addition to the SEPB, our enemies are aplenty..... Hey, do you have the determination to fight?”

Arisu was silent.

The determination to fight—indeed, in pursuing after Mari’s dream, it may be necessary for her to be resolved to do as much.

For a year, Arisu had continued in pursuit of Mari’s dying wish. It was all for the sake of finding out the true thoughts of her close friend who passed on without saying a word. She would never forget the chagrin she felt day after days of not having a single lead before she met Daisuke.

Arisu stared back to the girl.

“I won’t lose. Not to anybody or anything.”

“OK, that’s the spirit.”

With a grin, the girl closed in her lips to Arisu’s cheeks. To Arisu whose heart skipped a beat, she whispered into her ears.

“If you want to know more about the Mushi, look for the *Hunter*.”

Right next to Arisu with her eyebrows crossed, the girl spoke.

“That person knows about the Mushi..... no, it seems like they know something even deeper. But, be careful. It was none other than their fault that I am locked up in here—”

She did not manage to finish her words.

[Guest No.19, please put on the safety choker.]

The white coats prompted Arisu to stand up. They wrapped the chain around her neck, but did not go so far as to put on the arm restraint. Arisu turned back to the girl.

“H-hey, what did you mean by.....”

“We may never meet again for a second time. But—”

The girl held out her thumb and index finger at a right-angle pointed towards Arisu. Her pose with a wink reminded one of a model behind an easel.



“If we ever do meet again..... You would tell me the most awesome dream, right?”

Arisu smiled back.

“Of course. Who do you think I am?”

The two exchanged smiles before turning to their respective directions.



## Part 3

“Didn’t I warn you already, that you’ll definitely regret this.”

Meeting up with Daisuke again after ten odd minutes, that was the first thing he said to her pitiaably.

*“Kh.....”*

Arisu could not speak, her face completely flushed.

After parting with the girl which held a mysterious charm, Arisu had her clothes stripped from her.

She then proceeded through a pathway where she was sprayed with unforgivably hot water for sterilisation, followed by passing through a metal detector and X-ray room before coming face to face with a person in a laboratory coat. After a simple health check, she was finally released to the floor where Daisuke and the other Mushitsuki wait.

She was still able to accept the stringent check that bordered on being excessive. After all, they were dealing with Mushitsuki that were of a nature that is unknown.

However, there was something which she could not accept no matter what. After leaving the shower room, she was provided with a set of clothing which she must wear in the facility.

It was a set of undershirt and suit tights that hugged close to the bodyline.

“It’s still not too late. Wouldn’t it be better for you to turn back now?”

Daisuke said in an unusually kind tone. His gaze flitted from her lower body to her chest area.

“WHY THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR KIND CONSIDERATION!”

She wanted to send him flying, but she was currently using her arm to cover

her chest.

“THERE’S NOTHING FOR ME TO BE ASHAMED ABOUT! That’s right, I’m still in my growing phase..... my growing.....!”

“I-I get it, I’m sorry! So please don’t cry..... Okay?”

Through her blurry sight, Arisu kicked Daisuke in his shin exclaiming, ‘I’m not crying!’

The safety choker was only for Mushitsuki that were not members of SEPB. Daisuke did not have one on his neck.

Led by Daisuke, the two of them went down a passageway. He mentioned that they were going to meet up with somebody.

It was as if the desertedness of the place up till now was a lie, and a large traffic of people scurried along the passageway. However, much of the people were adults wearing laboratory coats, and people like Arisu and Daisuke who wore black clothing were rare.

The walls and the ceiling were not made with concrete but covered by metal. In addition, all the rooms along the passageway were fitted with thick glass windows which exposed everything in the rooms. Contrary to the gloomy atmosphere she expected, the wide passageway and the rooms were all brightly illuminated.

“There’s surprisingly lots of people around here.”

“That’s because we are close to the entrance here. This place is split into eight floors with this floor being the sixth where inspection and management of Mushitsuki takes place. The two floors above us are experimental facilities while the lower two are the accommodation and training facilities for captured Mushitsuki. The first to third floors are barred from entry by Mushitsuki personnel.”

All the people walking past them opened up the path when they saw Daisuke.

“Looks like you are quite the hated one..... Do you not have any friends or acquaintances here?”

“I do not need any allies.”

Daisuke flatly declared.

“Where the hell is that guy anyway. He didn’t mention anything else aside that he’s waiting at the sixth floor.”

Muttering to himself, Daisuke swiftly proceeded ahead and turned at the corner.

“Hey, wait up.”

Arisu rushed to catch up to him.

“What’s with that, you do have acquaintances here after all. Introduce him to me as well. I want to know more about the Mushitsuki—”

Turning at the corner, Arisu came to a stop.

Daisuke’s figure had disappeared all of a sudden.

“Hmm? Where did he go?”

“Acquaintance? He’s more than just that, he’s an ultra cool guy. Not to mention, he is strong but kind, the best kind of guy around.”

That was Daisuke’s voice. However, his figure was nowhere to be seen. Arisu looked around at her surroundings.

“Where are you hiding? Stop messing around and come out.”

“But, I’ll refrain from introducing him to you. If you were to be smitten by him, I’d be unable to live on anymore.”

“*Disgusting!* .....Stop saying uncanny stuff and quickly—”

Hugging her body in disgust, Arisu could hear grunting sound from above her. It was the sound of something writhing with a, ‘*Mnn! Mnn!*’ sound.

Turning her head up, Arisu was speechless.

“Yo, pleased to meet you.”

A youth hanging upside down smiled to her with a grin. His legs hung off a pipe running across the ceiling and his two hands were restraining Daisuke. Who knew what kind of magic he used to bind Daisuke’s hands behind his back and stuff his mouth so quickly.

*“Oof!”*

He released Daisuke who landed on the floor with a thud. Swing his body on the pipe, he cackled in laughter.

*“Ahaha, you can’t even land properly? Have you already become soft.”*

“How the hell do you expect me to do that with my hands tied behind my back! Untie this right away, *Aki!* And don’t ever mimic someone else’s voice to say some sickening things!”

*“Fine, fine.”*

The youth landed on the floor without making a sound. But, he did not untie the ropes and just looked down at Daisuke.

“However, this is truly pathetic..... do you actually have any self-awareness about your own position? You are the one feared by all the people here—”

*“Didn’t I tell you to untie it!”*





Ignoring the shouting Daisuke, the youth called *Aki* turned towards Arisu.

The youth had long slit eyes that hung under his long, bleached hair, leaving a deep impression on Arisu. He looks to be around one or two years older than Arisu. He does not seem to be from the surveillance team, seeing as he was not wearing goggles.

Judging from the situation, he seemed to have used the moment Daisuke left Arisu's gaze to quickly bind him up. It was an unbelievable feat. Furthermore, it was hard to imagine that he had the muscle strength to lift Daisuke up with just both of his arms from just his external appearance.

"I am Blaze Class Rank 5, *Aki* from the combat team. Nice to meet you, Spear-type."

The youth, *Aki*, held out his hand.

A smile formed naturally on Arisu's face.

First, the mysterious girl she met at the entrance room at the very beginning.

Then, this young man who seemed peculiar but has an amiable smile.

They all held different positions. However, even in a place like this, there were still Mushitsuki with positive smiles—.

Arisu gripped his hand firmly.

"For some reason, I feel like we would get along well."

"Ahaha, what a coincidence, me too. Oi, don't be jealous that we're getting along so well, okay."

"I don't care, just untie me already!"

## Part 4

“I’ve already heard about the situation. Sounds like a troublesome fellow.”

“I’d say she is about as strong as myself. Using the Rank system, she’d be around a Blaze Class Rank 6.”

“What’s that, that’s not a very big deal.”

“However, when she had been captured one year ago, she had only been unranked. Unlike the rest of the unranked small fries who remains unchanged.”

“So, you’re saying that her rate of improvement is unprecedented.....”

“That is one of the reasons that they’ve requested for you to convince her. They also felt that it was a waste for the experimental subjects to be turned into Fallen so rapidly. It seems like they really want for her to work for them as a member of SEPB.”

“One other reason is because of that, right. Well, fine. I already have a plan.”

“A plan?”

“.....Even so, how did you fail to convince a measly inmate, *Aki*. You’re too soft as always. There’s no need for us to sympathise with them—”

“She is different from the other inmates..... Well, you will see for yourself once you’ve meet her in person. Even for you, this time round it won’t be—”

In contrast to when they met just now, the two youths walking down the passageway now had completely different expressions.

With stern expressions, Daisuke and *Aki* walked down the passageway briskly.

As they entered deeper into the facility, Arisu realised that the number of people walking by decreased.

All of a sudden, *Aki* turned around to look at Arisu.

“Are you serious about bringing her along?”

“What’s with that. Is there a reason I can’t tag along?”

“Taking this opportunity, it’s better for her to see for herself as soon as possible.”

Daisuke said while facing the front as he walked, not meeting her eye. Arisu furrowed her eyebrows.

Eventually, the three of them reached the end of the passageway.

There were two elevator doors. Daisuke stood in front of the left elevator door, while Arisu was pulled by *Aki* to before the one on the right.

“We’re not going together?”

“The third practice hall on the seventh floor is partitioned by reinforced glass. Saying that you have a plan..... what is it that you are going to do?”

“You will understand once it starts.”

The two youths completely ignored Arisu’s query. Then, the doors to the elevators opened simultaneously.

Right before they entered, Daisuke turned to look at Arisu.

“.....?”

As Arisu tilted her head in doubt, he averted his gaze before disappearing into the elevator. She boarded the elevator on the right with *Aki* and it slowly began moving.

“Hey, didn’t he come just to convince the Mushitsuki? Why the equipment?”

“It’s probably to prepare for the worst or something. I was only ordered to bring him here, they didn’t tell me anything more. Don’t worry, even he wouldn’t do anything too overboard.”

The elevator soon came to a stop. The door opened, revealing a long passageway. The two of them proceed down side by side.

Arisu spoke out the question she had in mind.

“*Aki*, you don’t seem to fear Dai—him, right. Even though everyone else tries

to avoid him.”

“Hm? I guess so, we’ve known each other for long, we’re comrade in arms so to speak. Besides, no matter how strong he is, it doesn’t change the fact that he is still just a brat.”

“Hmm, so he is that strong.”

Arisu replied in a light tone. Aki looked at her in surprise.

“What is it, staring at me like you’ve seen a freak.”

“No, it’s nothing..... Don’t tell me that you’ve been staying by his side without knowing anything about him?”

“Of course, I know. Firstly, he lazes terribly in bed. Next, he’s weak to cute girls. In other words, he’s a closet pervert.”

“I-is that so? I..... never knew that.”

“Then, next is your turn. Tell me what you know about him.”

Facing Arisu who plainly ordered him, *Aki* turned sombre. He looks as if he can’t decide whether to tell her or not.

“Well, tell me.”

Arisu restated. The youth opened his mouth in hesitation.

“He is the strongest Mushitsuki.”

“.....”

“At least, that is how the people around views him, and he is in fact abnormally strong to match. It goes without any doubts that he had saved the SEPB from perilous situations multiple times. Most prominently, during that incident two years ago.”

“That incident?”

“It was a primary school girl. The SEPB set out to capture that girl who was a Mushitsuki. However, that girl was too strong. She was far stronger than anything the SEPB’s ever faced before or even imagined. It was due to her that several dozens of our members were turned into Fallen. For the SEPB of that time, a damage of that scale pretty much meant that they were wiped out. All

at the hands of a single girl..... by *Fuyuhotaru*.”

Arisu widened her eyes.

*Fuyuhotaru*—that was the name that Daisuke mentioned in his nightmare. The name that he told Arisu to never speak of again.

“The worst thing was that at the same time, a revolt was happening on the inside of the SEPB. The East Central Branch tried to usurp the Central Headquarters. However, that ended up in failure. ....In addition, almost all of the members that participated in the coup d'état were turned into Fallen. All by hands of a lone Mushitsuki.”

Arisu stared straight at *Aki*.

“That was none other than him. Concurrent with subjugating the coup d'état, he also succeeded in capturing *Fuyuhotaru*. All this was accomplished by him alone. One could even call it a national-level crisis. I was also one of the personnel who participated in the mission to capture *Fuyuhotaru*, but there was nothing I could do. She was someone who possessed strength equivalent to a disaster. ....And yet, he was still stronger than that girl.”

Arisu could almost see the fear bubbling up at the thought of that time from his side profile.

“I still remember clearly how he looked like when I first met him. It was as if he saw the whole world as his enemy. The other Mushitsuki fear him not only because of the fact that he is stronger than anyone else. It is also because he does not falter for even a second when defeating his enemies.”

But then, the youth's strict visage flipped around all of a sudden to form a smile.

“But, like I mentioned earlier, the usual him is just a brat that behaves like how he is just now. You've mentioned it yourself too. I also wanted to know what was it that made him so merciless as such and tried to find out, but..... lately, I've been wondering. Perhaps, I will never be able to understand him. Why is he the way he is..... even though there are Mushitsuki like her too.”

“Her?”



*Aki* did not reply her and only smiled as if to gloss over the issue.

“Well, in any case, it may be impossible for someone like me to be able to understand him. For all I know, he might actually be a real monster—”

“If you speak any further, I’m going to hold you in disdain.”

Arisu realised that she was unconsciously glaring at *Aki*.

*—No matter who it is, anybody would be afraid of monsters, that’s all.*

Arisu recalled how Daisuke looked when he said that. She could not view him the way he spoke about himself seeing how he hid his expression behind an ironic smile.

“.....My bad, that was a slip of tongue. Forget I ever said that.”

*Aki* raised both of his hands with a bitter smile.

“That’s right, it may be difficult for me, but if it’s someone the same—someone as strong as he is may be able to comprehend his thoughts.”

“.....”

“You seem pretty strong as well. He did mention how you were the first to stop a straight-on attack by him.”

“Well, I guess I can do that sometimes.”

“If it’s you, then maybe..... you can understand him.”

Looking at the side profile of the youth muttering to himself, he seemed to be brooding over something.

They reached the end of the passageway.

The door opened before the two of them.

It revealed a wide room. Large machines lined the floor and monitors were placed everywhere. A large number of adults in laboratory coats turned to look at them. There was a large glass window installed at the end of the room.

All of the adults stared at Arisu and *Aki*. Their gazes were as if they were going to swallow her whole.

“W-what’s with these people.....”

“They’re bursting with curiosity at you. This is an observation room for gathering data, and all of them are observers. In the eyes of such people, Mushitsuki like us are nought but guinea pigs.”

*Aki* whispered to her softly.

“Get into standby, Blaze Class Rank 5 member, *Aki*.”

“Yes.”

Following the order, *Aki* moved towards the glass window inside with Arisu in tow.

“You just sit down here obediently. No matter what happens.”

“What do you mean no matter what happens.....”

Beyond the glass was a vast hall that was as large as Arisu’s school gym. In the centre of the hall, a block of reinforced glass partitioned the hall into two areas. The inside of the hall was dark and she couldn’t really see anything.

“The other side is unable to see through to this side. This door over there leads to the hall, but it has never been used before.”

Just as *Aki* was speaking.

A figure appeared from a tunnel by the side of the wall.

It was Daisuke. He was wearing the familiar jet-black coat and a handgun hung from his right hand.

When Daisuke stood in front of the reinforced glass, a female voice rang out from the speaker.

[Test subject 2587 shall enter the training premises.]

A high-pitched alarm resounded noisily, causing Arisu to stiffen at the suddenness.

The alarm stopped just as randomly, causing the area to be enveloped in a tense atmosphere.

—*Just what is going to happen now.....?*

Trembling, Arisu noticed a movement in the corner of her eye.

At a space in the hall where the illumination does not reach.

A pair of white legs appeared from beyond the darkness.

“.....!”

Arisu’s breathing paused momentarily.

Standing before the illumination was a lightly-dressed girl. Her neck was wrapped by chains, and both of her arms were bound by restraints.

That was undoubtedly the girl Arisu met at the entrance room.

“That girl.....!”

However, different from when Arisu met her the first time, she had a sharp glint in her eye. Looking at her eyes with her emotions fiercely suppressed, Arisu felt a chill run down her back.

The girl smirked. It was directed towards Daisuke who stood beyond the reinforced glass.

[No matter how many of you show up, my will will never change. I will never approve of you guys, SEPB.....!]

The coldness of her voice shocked Arisu. Just how much anger was behind the voice for it to sound so icy.

[Just because they are Mushitsuki, you would capture these innocent people and lock them up here..... And that’s not all, you guys even force them against their will to capture other Mushitsuki just like themselves. If you ask me, I’d say that rather than the Mushi, you guys are the real monsters!]

Daisuke did not even move an iota receiving her rant, only staring at her calmly.

*Aki’s* face twisted.

“More than ten members have tried to convince her one-on-one. However, all of the attempts ended in failure. That was because.....”

Daisuke turned to face their side. He lifted his chin in the direction of Arisu and the rest who he should not be able to see.

[Understood. Let the other inmates in.]

“Wha-.....?”

*Aki* uttered in surprise.

Several people dressed in the same light clothes as the girl appeared from behind her.

There were several dozens of people, all of them with chokers and arm restraints. They gathered around the girl facing Daisuke.

“This number..... are almost all of the inmates gathered here? What the hell are you planning to do!”

This must have been beyond his expectations, as *Aki* became restless. On the other hand, the adults in coats watched over the situation in silence.

[Everybody.....!]

The girl was caught by surprise as well, widening her eyes in astonishment.

[Rina.....!]

[Are you alright, Rina!]

[Rina!]

Surrounding her, the inmates shouted chaotically. Rina must have referred to the girl with the sharp gaze.

“What? What is happening.....?”

Arisu looked towards the youth next to her. *Aki* still appeared to be bewildered, but he swept his gaze across the hall and spoke.

“All these people are the Mushitsuki that the SEPB had captured..... In the year that Rina had been imprisoned, all the Mushitsuki had gathered around her somehow. It was till the extent that even some the bureau members held the same opinions as her. As a result, they could not treat her roughly. This in turn affected the persuasion of other inmates.”

Arisu could accept that explanation readily.

She had felt it from the time they first met, be it her words or her expression—all of it held a charm which attracted people.

[What's your intention? Are you planning on convincing all of us at the same time?]

Rina flashed a provoking smile towards Daisuke. Having gained allies, Rina and the other inmates seemed to have grown even more rebellious.

But—.

[*K-Kakkou.....?*]

Out of the blue, voice erupted from behind Rina.

[*Kakkou.....! It's Kakkou!*]

[Run, Rina! That guy.....!]

Voices that sounded like shrieks spread like wildfire, plunging the hall into a state of panic. All of their looks of fear were fixated at none other than Daisuke.

*"Kakkou.....?"*

Arisu furrowed her eyebrows.

[Blaze Class Rank 1 member, *Kakkou*. Please execute your mission.]

A commandeering voice echoed in the hall.

[Understood.]

The one who replied was none other than Kusuriya Daisuke who had his face hidden behind the goggles. Arisu was shocked.

[Rina!]

[*Kakkou.....!*]

[Rina!]

[*K-Kakkou.....!*]

Between the two extremes of shrieks and angry cries, Daisuke and Rina stared at each other in silence.

*—Just what are the two of them.....!*

Arisu was unable to even speak.

The mysterious girl, Rina, and Daisuke with a ruthless expression.



It was as if they were exact opposites.

Rina was probably a presence that instilled courage in her fellow Mushitsuki; that was evident from the behaviour of the people around her currently.

In contrast, the way Daisuke was reflected in their eyes was as if they were looking at a slaughterer looking to deprive them of their dreams.

A Mushitsuki that provides, and a Mushitsuki that robs.

The two polarising Mushitsuki stood face-to-face separated by the reinforced glass.

[I see. You are the infamous..... *Kakkou*. The vilest and the worst Mushitsuki!]

[.....]

The girl was overflowing with rage and hostility. Conversely, Daisuke was unchangingly expressionless.

Without warning, Daisuke opened his mouth to speak.

[Don't you want to defeat this vilest Mushitsuki?]

The hodgepodge of voices in the hall came to an abrupt stop.

[Anyone is fine. If any of you can defeat me, then I'll release every single one of you.]

Compared to how he was at school normally, it was a low voice that Arisu thought did not seem to belong to him.

The hall was wrapped in stillness. Then, a commotion interspersed with fear and doubt was raised.

[Do you really think that we would believe your words? Having locked us up all this time..... just what are you planning now.]

[It's up to you guys whether to believe it or not. Are you going to do it? Or are you not?]

At his words, Rina and the rest turned to face one another.

"What the heck is he thinking....."

Their hesitation reached up to where Arisu and the others were at. *Aki*

groaned.

Having made up her mind, Rina readied into a stance.

[It's not like we have any other choices, right. ....Fine, bring it on, I'll face you myself.]

[However. Anyone except for you, Rina.]

[Wha-.....! Why—]

[F-fine..... I'll do it]

The one who raised his hand in place of Rina was a young man with short hair and a sturdy-looking body.

Several minutes later.

The short-haired young man was brought by several bureau members to in front of Daisuke.

[Y-you will really release everyone if I win, right?]

At the same time, the tension in the room Arisu was in rose.

“If it comes down to it, make sure that we can electrocute the inmates whenever.”

One of the elderly man ordered. The people sitting in front of the displays nodded.

“.....”

Aki frowned towards the hall with an austere expression.

[Ah. I have to mention this before however.]

[.....?]

[Do not expect me to hold back in the least.]

His words marked the start of the battle.

A green Cleridae appeared out of nowhere and descended onto Daisuke. The moment it touched his handgun, the Cleridae morphed into feelers that combined with his handgun and body, The short-haired young man also materialised his Mushi. It was a large Mushi with alternating black and white

stripes on its long and narrow body. With thin blade-like wings and an abnormally long and slender mouthpiece, it closely resembled a mosquito. A green fluid dripped from the tip of its mouthpiece.

The young man's Mushi had been first to move. The moment it flapped its wings, its huge body already flew over Daisuke's head.

*—It's fast.....!*

Arisu couldn't even capture the moment the mosquito accelerated with her eyes.

Daisuke had not even readied his handgun and remained standing still. Behind him, the huge mosquito was flying at alarming speed.

Looking at how Daisuke did not make a single move, the young man must have thought he had a chance of winning and flashed a grin.

*"It's dangerous.....!"*

Arisu reflexively shouted out loud.

Having circled to his back in an instant, the mosquito accelerated aiming for Daisuke's back.

But in the next moment, Daisuke jumped. Leaping into the air with superhuman leg strength, he did a somersault mid-air. The mosquito's sharp mouthpiece barely grazed his coat.

A cannon-like blast of a gunshot reverberated.

*[Guaah!]*

The bullet shot by Daisuke pierced through the mosquito's wing.

With a groan, the young man collapsed onto his knees. —The damage sustained by a Mushi is rebounded to their host's psyche.

The injured mosquito rammed into the wall.

Daisuke landed on the ground and walked towards the young man who was grinding his molar with a look of frustration. —However, he then walked past him and approached the mosquito.

The sound of a cannon boomed out again.

[*Ga..... ah.....!*]

The bullet tore the mosquito's leg into shreds.

[*Wha-.....!*]

""*Wha-.....!*""

Rina, Arisu and Aki's voice overlapped.

[The match is already decided! It's our loss! So, just stop!]

[Decide on who is going to come face me next.]

Daisuke said coldly. With another gunshot, another of the Mushi's leg was blown apart.

[What..... did you say?]

[We're going to continue, until the very last person. —Or, until you pledge to cooperate with the SEPB, Rina.]

The hall and the room were dominated by silence.

On his face turned back to face Rina, there was a smile. As if he was enjoying how he was torturing the Mushi before him.



*“Kakkou..... You.....!”*

Aki glared towards Daisuke in the hall. His look of shock was gradually seeped with anger.

*—Wrong.....*

In a daze, Arisu groaned in her heart.

*—This isn’t Daisuke. That person is.....!*

[.....You are not human.....]

Rina broke the silence in a penetratingly cold voice. Pervading through the reinforced glass, Rina glared at Daisuke murderously.

[If you’re targeting me, then fight me yourself! Why are involving these unrelated people, *Kakkou! KAKKOU!*]

[There’s no way they’re unrelated. Those of you behind Rina, watch closely. As long as you remain here—as long as I am around, there’s no way any of you are getting freedom. I’ll teach you guys that you have no options other than to submit yourselves.]

*“Oi, give Kakkou the order to stop! There’s no need for him to go so far!”*

Aki turned towards the coated staffs.

*“Everything is proceeding as planned. Continue the collection of data.”*

The most senior researcher announced indifferently.

*“What the hell..... do you see us Mushitsuki as—”*

[Those who still do not understand, step up. Before this guy’s Mushi is completely destroyed.]

The cannon-like booms continued, further wounding the mosquito. The young man continued to groan in pain.

The hall was absolutely inundated in fear. None of the inmates stood forward, only watching the tragedy unfold before them in terror.

[Stop! Stop it, *Kakkou! KAKKOU!*]

A Mushi materialised behind the screaming Rina. There were seven red spots

on its frightful rugged carapace—giving an impression of a ladybird. Its ominously wriggling mouthpiece looks like it could bite off someone’s head in one go.

The ladybird slammed its body against the reinforced glass. However, that only caused the wall to shake a bit.

[That’s futile, the only one who can break that glass in the SEPB is me. Stand down your Mushi. If not, I will activate your choker.]

[Why are you going so far……! Even though we’re all Mushitsuki……!]

Rina scratched at the glass until her nails bled.

*—My dream is…… to build a place of belonging for Mushitsuki.*

The girl who had said that with a pure smile was currently bawling right in front of Arisu’s eyes. At that ghastly scene, Arisu could only stand there in a stupor.

*“Kakkou……! Why are you going so far……!”*

*Aki* too was banging his hand against the glass. It was a voice tinged with anger, disbelief and slight loneliness.

*“……”*

Arisu wordlessly grabbed the metallic fence above the equipment.

A silvery radiance shone above her head. It was the Morpho butterfly.

Unrest ran through the room. *Aki* turned towards Arisu.

*“W-what are you doing?”*

*“What, you ask……?”*

Muttering in a subdued voice, she turned towards *Aki* with a glare. She must have looked ferocious, as *Aki* took a step back in recoil.

*“There’s no way something like this can be allowed. Why is there a need for him to go so far……!”*

In her sights, Daisuke was still attacking the defenceless Mushi. The back that she always saw right next to her seemed to be emitting malice now.



However, there were no changes at all in the Morpho butterfly fluttering above her head.

Arisu looked up at the silver butterfly.

—*Mari.....!*

The Morpho butterfly had once belonged to her close friend, Hanashiro Mari. That Mushi had now been entrusted to Arisu. She could not fathom its true intentions, but it had always protected her whenever she was in danger.

—*Please, Mari.....!*

She shouted in her heart.

Even so, the Morpho butterfly merely flapped its wings above her. Arisu bit back her molars strongly.

[Stop it, *Kakkou!* .....Please, just stop!]

[Pledge your cooperation! All of you!]

The shouts of the two Mushitsuki intermeshed.

“.....!”

Arisu released her hands for the fence at last and kicked off the ground.

She went before the door which *Aki* mentioned was connected to the hall. There were a multitude of buttons before her, but she just smashed them all at random.

“Oi, stop that immediately! .....Activate the choker for the guest—”

“No..... you will let her go.”

A low voice resounded in the room.

Having moved without anybody noticing, *Aki* stood in the centre of the room. In front of him was a staff before a machine that probably operated the chokers.

“If you activate the chokers, I will attack you with my Mushi. Open the door and let her go.”

Countless lapis lazuli spots were on the staff's body. Looking more closely,

they had small legs beneath a smooth and round carapace; it was a Mushi that resembled a leaf beetle.

“You dare..... *Aki!* Don’t think you will get off lightly for pulling this!”

“No need for your threats. Quickly do as I said. This is not just an intimidation. You do know how much we Mushitsuki hate you guys, right?”

Arisu stared at *Aki*. He looked back at her with a look of pain, one that seemed unbearable.

“She..... Rina said to me, someone who had always been her enemy, to build a place of belonging together.”

*—Even though there are Mushitsuki like her.....*

*—It was till the extent that even some the bureau members held the same opinions as her.*

*Aki* had mentioned that before. No doubts he was referring to himself when he said that.

“And also, I..... can no longer understand him. *Kakkou*—I cannot even stop him. That’s why.....”

The door connecting to the hall opened.

Arisu turned around. Passing through the door, she ran down the dim stairway. She opened the door that stood at the end of the stairway.

Noticing Arisu and the silver Morpho butterfly that burst into the hall, Daisuke turned around.

“Arisu.....?”

A deafening alarm rang in the hall.

“.....Stop it.....”

She was planning to admonish him, but only a husky voice came out.

It had only been for a short moment that she had met the youth known as Kusuriya Daisuke and stayed with him under one roof. She had witnessed before many times the figure of him acting under his mission of capturing Mushitsuki.

However, the him that attend the same school as her was nothing but an ordinary youth. Whether it was during when he was caught up in one of Arisu's whims, or when he blushed when held closely by Ena and Takako. She believed somewhere in her heart that that was the real him.

Despite that—.

“Stop what you are doing right now!”

Arisu screamed, her eyes turning wet.

“Why is it..... why is it that you can do such a horrible thing? Isn't that person a Mushitsuki like yourself! And yet.....!”

Daisuke only faced Arisu with her eyebrows raised wordlessly.

A silence fell between the two, with only the alarm blaring in the background.

Daisuke opened his mouth.

“That is my mission.”

The sound of something within Arisu came to a halt.

“Dai—”

About to shout, however, Arisu widened her eyes.

Perhaps noticing the presence, Daisuke forcefully turned to his back.

The young man who he thought had lost consciousness stood up. The now legless mosquito got up to attack Daisuke's back.

Daisuke, his attention caught by Arisu for a moment, instantly held up his handgun.

A roar rang out.

“Ah.....”

Right before Arisu's eyes, the body of the mosquito scattered.

All the light faded from the short-haired young man's eyes. By the time his knees touched the floor, the expression of suffering on his face had already disappeared. It was replaced by a doll-like expressionless look that just stared at the ground.

Mushitsuki who loses their Mushi turn into Fallen, losing their thoughts and emotion—never to regain them. Arisu knew of that as well.

Arisu and Daisuke looked down at the fallen young man in a daze.

And then.

“—*Fu..... Ahaha.....*”

They heard the sound of laughter. It was a chilly laughter, one that froze the hearts of whoever heard it.

Daisuke and Arisu turned to looked beyond the glass.

Rina was leaning forwards. Her hair dangled over her face making her look like a vengeful spirit, and they spotted her lips curving into a smile.

“What the heck..... from the very start, you were going to turn him..... turn all of us into Fallen in the first place.....?”

*That’s wrong—.*

Arisu shook her head.

Daisuke had only not noticed the mosquito because his attention was occupied by Arisu.

The hall shook violently.

The huge ladybird rammed itself against the reinforced glass ferociously.

“I clearly get it now. What we should do is not to submit ourselves, nor to come to an agreement. —We must fight!”

Rina raised her head. Her eyes were burning with fury and hatred.

“Not to mention, that Morpho butterfly..... Did you think I would forget? So, you—the *Hunter* was an ally of the SEPB as well.....”

The hall shook repeatedly with intense tremors.

“The *Hunter*.....? I am.....?”

Arisu subconsciously muttered.

The body of the ladybird ramming the wall progressively increased in size.

The sound of something cracking with a *Krr* sounded out.

A large crack appeared on the reinforced glass.

“Unforgivable..... The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau..... I’ll crush every single one of you.....”

The girl screamed.

“I’ll kill all of you!”

The ladybird spread its huge wings widely.

“Arisu!”

Daisuke threw himself towards Arisu who stood stunned.

An explosion occurred. —That was all that Arisu’s consciousness took in.

Right before her view was shrouded in white, she saw that the reinforced glass partition, the wall and the door connecting to the passageway were all blown away. Sent flying by the powerful shockwave, she lost her sense of direction.

A howl that seemed to shake the air resounded in the facility.

She had lost consciousness for a second. When she came to, she had been lying on the floor.

“*Kuh..... uh.....*”

She heard the voice of someone gasping in pain.

“.....Eh.....”

Arisu raised her head.

She came to face with Daisuke who was grimacing in pain. Blood covered most of his face.

Arisu was pinned under a thick shard of glass. By right, the impact of being hit by such a piece of reinforced glass should have injured her heavily.

However, she was mostly unharmed. The reason for that was none other than the presence of the boy between her and the glass.

“Why.....! Daisuke.....! Even if it was your mission to guard me—”

“It doesn’t matter..... whether it’s my mission or not..... How could I possibly let you die.....!”

He spoke in a feeble voice that could only reach Arisu. At his words, her heart fluttered.

“W-what’s with that.....”

He hurt other Mushitsuki mercilessly, saying that it was his mission. And yet, he tried to protect Arisu even if it risked his life.

Daisuke said that that wasn’t because of his mission.

She could not understand the youth known as Kusuriya Daisuke. For who or what reason was he acting so unfeeling, but still willing to risk his life to protect Arisu.

“Just why.....! Daisuke.....!”

Arisu’s voice was drowned out by the roar of the giant ladybird. It was a roar of excitement at being released.

“Where are you, *Kakkou*! I’m going to kill you! Don’t think about escaping either, *Hunter*!”

“A-..... Activate test subject 2587’s choker!”

The explosion had revealed the observation room as well. In front of *Aki* who was smashed into the wall by the shockwave, a staff reached out his hand to the equipment.

“.....!”

Rina’s eyes widened, and her body arched backwards.

However—.

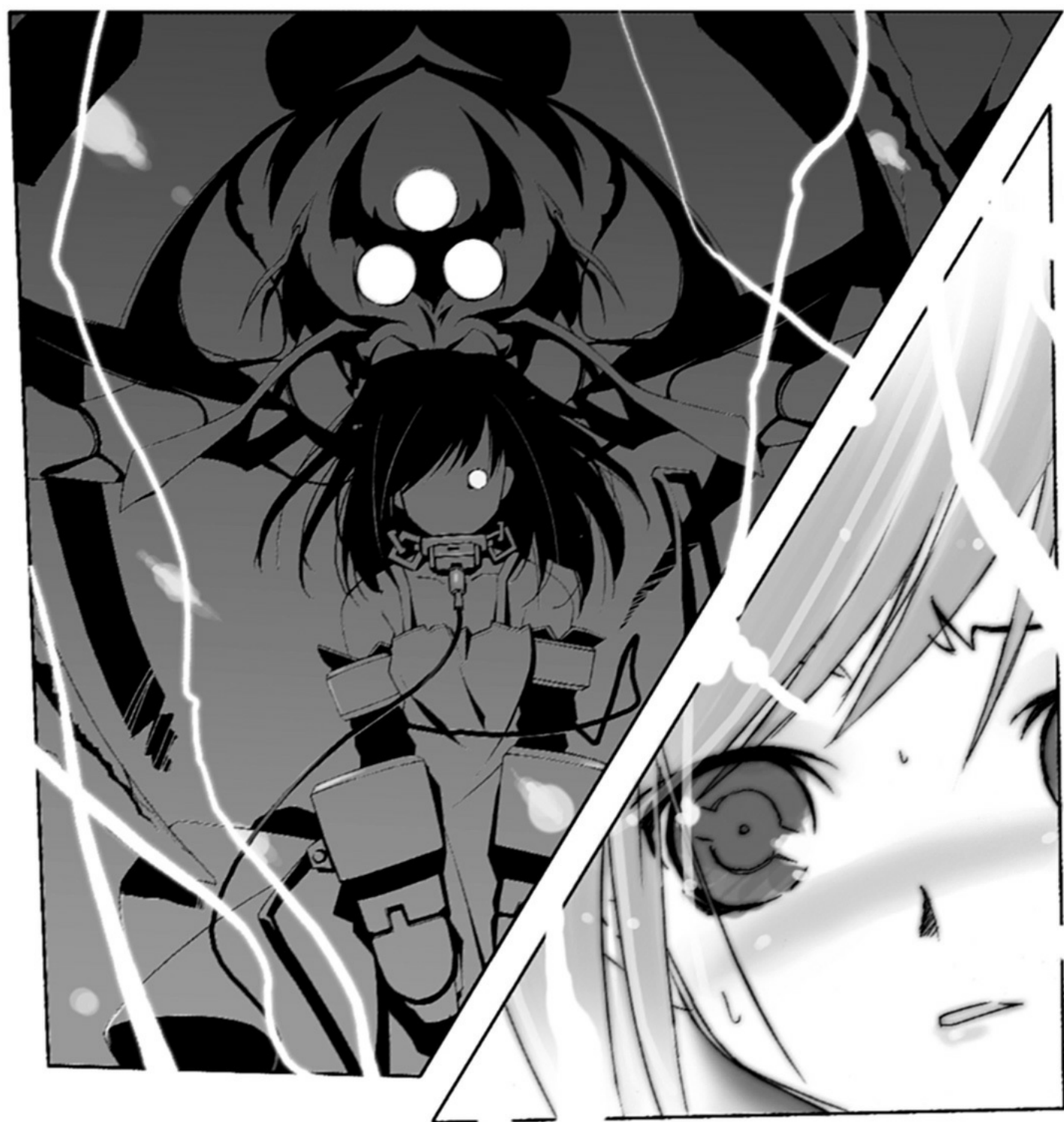
Another roar shook the entire hall.

Having been hit by a surge of electricity, Rina kneeled on the ground weakly. However, she was still conscious.

Rather than disappearing, the ladybird must have sensed the danger its host was in. It pummelled its body into the wall in the direction of the observation room. A large tremor rocked the hall, causing large cracks to snake along the

walls.





“Why isn’t it stopping.....! Don’t tell me, it’s maturing—”

The words of the staff were cut off halfway. He had been kicked away by *Aki*.

“The choker had the opposite effect.....! If such a strong Mushi as that goes berserk, there’ll be no stopping it.....! If you don’t want to die, then stop using it!”

[An emergency has occurred. All combat members, please head towards the third practice hall—]

The voice coming from the speaker faded away into noise. *Aki* had rendered the operator of the choker unconscious and snatched away the announcement mike.

[.....Protect Rina!]

*Aki*’s voice echoed in the hall.

Right when a large amount of personnel in white coats poured in to subjugate the inmates, the sudden voice caused them to falter.

[Everybody in the facility, listen to me! Rina has defeated *Kakkou*! I repeat, Rina has defeated *Kakkou*! The safety chokers are also inactive!]

*Aki*’s shouting voice reverberated in the hall through the speaker.

“Run, Rina! You will be captured again if you remain here!”

“It’s Rina! Protect Rina! As long as she is alright.....!”

The liberated inmates formed a protective layer around Rina.

In addition, there were other bureau members who aligned with Rina apart from *Aki*. The oppressed and rebelling inmates and the white coats formed two sides which fought against each other.

“*Aki*.....”

Daisuke turned his grimacing face towards *Aki*.

The gazes of Daisuke, and *Aki* who said that they were comrade in arms crossed.

“*Kakkou*..... I do not understand you at all anymore.”

Aki said.

“That’s why, I’ll stake on Rina. Rina is different from those of us in SEPB..... she truly fights for the sake of us Mushitsuki.”

“You idiot..... You are mistaken on what our true enemy is.....!”

His voice was so raspy that it could not have reached Aki.

The hall had fallen into complete chaos with angry cries and the sound of alarm in the background. Rina, whose consciousness was cloudy, was ferried away by the other inmates.

The angry shouts and explosions started becoming distant from the hall.

“Don’t go..... Just stay still for now.....”

Daisuke stopped Arisu who was about to move.

“.....You..... mustn’t die here no matter what.....”

“Why.....! He’s your friend, isn’t he! I have to stop.....!”

“You’ve seen it too, she’s..... Rina is strong..... and so am I..... But, those of us may eventually have our dreams completely consumed and our Mushi mature.....”

Daisuke’s breathing become faint. She did not know if he even knew what was he saying himself.

“At that time..... the only one who can stop us..... is not any other Mushitsuki..... but someone strong..... and not a Mushitsuki. It’s you.....”

Arisu widened her eyes.

“What’s with that—”

Daisuke ran out of energy. The weight of the glass and the unconscious Daisuke encumbered Arisu.

*Does that mean you protected me just so that I may defeat you—.*

Rina, Kakkou, and the Hunter—these few words that she had just learnt recently floated in her mind before vanishing.

“Just what the hell are they.....”

She slowly closed her eyes.

“What are they..... Mushitsuki.....”

Arisu lifted her head.

A silver light glinted above Daisuke’s head—slicing through the smoke, the Morpho butterfly danced coolly in the air.

The sound of angry cries mixed with screams, followed by explosions.

The Central Headquarters of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau was in complete disarray due to the uprising of the inmates.

Arisu took in the scene motionlessly.

“*Kakkou*..... I do not understand you at all anymore.”

The youth wrapped in a black coat, *Aki* said.

Trapped under a huge shard of broken glass, Daisuke groaned with his face blood-soaked.

“You idiot.....!”

“That’s why, I’ll stake on Rina. Rina is different from those of us in SEPB..... she truly fights for the sake of us Mushitsuki.”

“.....You are mistaken on what our true enemy is .....!”

Both the faces of Daisuke and *Aki* who glared at each other at a distance had pained expressions.

“Daisuke.....”

Next to the injured Daisuke, Arisu could do nothing but watch their separation—.

# Episode 06. The Vows of the Separated Dreams

Amidst the sound of angry cries mixed with screams followed by explosions, the Central Headquarters of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau was in complete disarray due to the uprising of the inmates.

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The youth wrapped in a black coat, *Aki* said.

Trapped under a huge shard of broken glass, Daisuke groaned with his face blood-soaked.

*“You idiot.....!”*

*“That’s why, I’ll stake on Rina. Rina is different from those of us in SEPB..... she truly fights for the sake of us Mushitsuki.”*

*“.....You are mistaken on what our true enemy is .....!”*

Both the faces of Daisuke and *Aki* who glared at each other at a distance had pained expressions.

*“Daisuke.....”*

Next to the injured Daisuke, Arisu could do nothing but watch their separation—.

## Part 1

The sound of waves crashing flowed from the speakers installed throughout the facility.

Harsh sunlight filtered down from around ten metres off the ground.

The smell of chlorine wafted over in place of the smell of the sea in the direction of the sandy beach beyond the shimmer of hot air.

“Come on, next up is this!”

Atop a man-made hill, Ichinokuro Arisu declared jubilantly. Before them was the mouth of a tube-shaped water slide.

Next to her was Saionji Ena, whose fists were clenched as if she could not stand to wait. On the other hand, Kujou Takako looked at the scenery below absentmindedly. The two of them were also from Horusu Seijou Academy Middle School, and were Arisu’s classmate.

“I’ll slide down at the speed of light!”

“Yahoo!”

“Yay!”

Arisu punched her fist into the air and Ena jumped ecstatically. Takako beamed along with them.

“Haah.....”

The sigh came from Kusuriya Daisuke who stood behind them. Making sure that Ena and Takako could not see, he displayed a frank bothersome look.

There was a line of beach demarcated by concrete and a pool. Further in was a man-made hill next a small castle. Various shops lined the walkway and the latest pop music streamed from someplace.

They were inside the indoor dome water theme park, ‘LUPY’. It was a popular

all-season establishment located next to Akamaki City at Kurobishi City.

Making use of their holiday, Arisu and the rest came here to 'LUPY' to play.

There were two factors that led to their decision. One was that Takako's father had received free tickets due to his corporation being the sponsor for the facility. The other reason was—.

"Are you all ready? What will be our order of attack?"

Arisu held back her enthusiasm and turned around. After much indecision, she had chosen to go with a two-piece swimsuit with floral design on a white base, and short pants paired with miniskirt. In her hand was the free pass she had received from Takako.

"How about Takako be first to go occasionally?"

Ena suggested, smiling mischievously dressed in a neon bikini. With her short hair and slender body, she exuded the impression of a healthy feline beauty.

"You mean me? But, I feel a bit nervous."

Takako gently tilted her head. With her appearance of a twist bra swimsuit with a pareo around her waist combined with her tall stature amongst the three, it would not be strange for people to think that she was a high school student.

"....."

Daisuke stared at another direction in thought, looking completely uninterested. He was dressed in pants and singlet, a waist pouch hanging off his midriff.

"Then, Kusuriya-kun shall decide!"

"Eh?"

He immediately lifted his face in surprise at Ena's statement. His lack of attention was blatant.

"Kusuriya-kun is first up! Or is it that..... you want to slide together with me?"

Ena interlocked her arm with Daisuke's. From the back, they probably looked like a couple going to slide down alongside.



Daisuke nodded his head flusteredly.

“N-no thanks, I’m fine. Erm…… I go by myself.”

“There’s no need for you to be shy.”

Ena puffed up her cheeks.

Arisu laughed grinningly.

“Then, I shall go next. I’ll catch up immediately and kick you straight to purgatory.”

“Coming from Ichinokuro-san, it sure doesn’t sound like a joke……”

In reality, the slender and light Arisu descended the slide smoothly without stopping. Right before Daisuke exited the slide, she caught up brilliantly and succeeded in booting him into the water with her entire body weight.

After that, the four of them had lunch before tackling all the various attractions. Their last station was the man-made beach known as ‘Twilight Beach’. It was a wave pool complete with a waterfall on a plastic rockface.

In contrast to the still-lively girls heading towards the beach, Daisuke looked completely bushed.

“Once we conquer this area, our conquest of ‘LUPY’ would be as good as finished!”

“Preparations for attack are ready, Captain Arisu!”

“It’s complete~.”

Behind Arisu and the rest who were posing, Daisuke raised his eyebrows.

“What conquest…… Hmm? Isn’t there still one place left? I recall it’s a haunted house called ‘Horror Laboratory’ —”

*“Arisu Straight~!”*

*“Ena Bodyblow~!”*

*“Erm…… Takako Kick~!”*

Spinning around, the girls’ attack beat into Daisuke consecutively. Holding his cheek and stomach, Daisuke mumbled, ‘E-even Kujou-san……’ with his

shoulders shivering.

The girls had an implicit agreement to treat the attraction known as ‘Horror Laboratory’ to be off-topic. In other words, ‘Such a place does not exist, consequently, none shall speak of it’—even for the three girls with varying personalities, that was a common viewpoint they all shared.

They then proceeded to the beach with smiling faces, as if nothing had happened.

“Come on, Daisuke. Stop dillying-dallying around and come over here.”

“Whose fault do you think that is..... No thanks, I’ll just take a break here. Don’t mind me and have fun.”

Hearing Daisuke appeal for a break, Ena grumbled unhappily, ‘Eeh? You’re not joining us, Kusuriya-kun?’ Arisu had no choice but to stay behind as well, leaving Ena and Takako to head towards the beach with disappointed looks.

Daisuke breathed out with a *phew*. Replacing his phony smile with a look of disgruntlement, he sat down at the edge of the empty beach.

“I know exactly what you are thinking right now. ‘Tch, why do I have to come to place like this. Now is not the time to be playing around’, or something like that, right.”

Arisu sat down next to Daisuke.

The sunlight streaming down from the ceiling along with an unnatural light shone down on the two of them.

It was the Morpho butterfly. It fluttered down energetically onto Arisu’s shoulder, as if ridiculing the large number of man-made objects in the dome.

“If you knew that, then how about having some self-awareness about your own position. There’s got to be a limit to your lack of tension, geez.”

Saying so, he laid down on the beach. Using his arms as a pillow, he just stared at the ceiling.

*Mushi*—an existence that possesses people and feed on their hopes and dreams. Although the government officially denies their existence, the Morpho butterfly belonging to Hanashiro Mari is in fact an actual Mushi.

When Mari left the world due to her illness, she entrusted Arisu with the Morpho butterfly. Meanwhile, Kusuriya Daisuke belongs to the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, a governmental organisation tasked with capturing and isolating Mushitsuki. Thus, his reason for staying by Arisu's side was to monitor her.

"The one who needs to be more self-aware is you, Daisuke."

Arisu said with a sigh as she looked down at him.

"What do you mean by that."

"Ena and Takako were worried over how you looked so listless the past few days. It was also for that reason that they suggested to come here, for you to cheer up."

"Hah? Who are you saying is listless?"

"Both in school or at home, you seemed to be in deep thoughts and wouldn't even respond when someone call you out. Of course, they'd be worried."

"No one asked for their concern....."

Daisuke turned to face the opposite direction, shielding his face from Arisu's view.

"What do you mean no one asked for it, idiot Daisuke! In any case, you're probably fretting over what happened that time, right?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"It's useless to feign ignorance. I'm talking about the uproar that occurred at the Central Headquarters. You're still bothered over *Aki's* betrayal of the SEPB, right."

His reticence all but affirmed Arisu's words.

Arisu had tagged along with Daisuke to visit the Central Headquarters of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau the other day.

Over there, Arisu witnessed the uprising of the inmates at the Central Headquarters—as well as the betrayal of *Aki*, one of Daisuke's comrade.

"I thought that he of all people should have understood....."

After a brief silence, Daisuke muttered.

“Dreading the Mushi and fearing the organisation..... Even in the gathering of cowards known as Central Headquarters, I thought that he alone was different. And yet, just what is the idiot thinking.”

In a tone of annoyance, Daisuke narrated. His heavy injuries sustained during the uproar was treated on the spot by the Mushitsuki with a restoring ability, *Nene*.

“I also can’t read the Central Headquarters at all. Despite their severe dogma regarding failures, they didn’t even dish out a single punishment for me who failed so spectacularly. In the first place, why the heck did they even assign the mission of investigating Hanashiro Mari’s Mushi and Central Headquarters’ own mission to me who belongs to another jurisdiction? .....Damn it, nothing’s gone well at all ever since I came to Akamaki City.”

It was rare to see him to vent his frustration. He must have been pondering about this all by himself this whole time. Arisu uttered amazed.

“Stupid Daisuke.”

“Wha-.....”

She pointed her index finger right before Daisuke’s nose as he turned over.

“Setting the other matters aside, it’s very much your responsibility that *Aki* turned that way.”

“How is that my—”

“You said he alone should have understood..... how and what is he supposed to have understood. Have you ever had a heartfelt talk with him? He said this to me: that no longer understands what you are thinking.”

Seeing him widen his eyes, he must have been shocked.

“See, you didn’t understand his feelings either. No matter how long you guys were war buddies for, there are plenty of things that you wouldn’t know if you do not speak out.”

Daisuke kept silent.

You wouldn't know if you do not speak out—at her own words, Arisu turned to look at the Morpho butterfly on her shoulder.

Mari too had departed without saying anything to Arisu. What was she thinking about at that moment, Arisu had no idea at all.

A shrill quarrelling voice reached the two who fell into taciturnity.

“Why don't you understand no matter times I repeat myself!”

“W-why is Kou-chan shouting!”

“That's because you are being so wilful!”

“Wah, Kou-chan is angry! It's over for us!”

A bit further from the beach, a young couple was quarrelling in front of a tropical juice stand.

The taller one was a boy who looks to be in the upper grades of primary school. His face, which looked like it would be popular amongst the girls of his class, was presently distorted in anger.

On the other side was a petite girl. Her hair was tied above her left ear, and she wore a two-piece swimsuit adorned with a belt. As she was covering her face with both of her hands, her face could not be seen.

“—Mari?”

Arisu raised her face.

The Morpho butterfly had suddenly flew off. Flapping its wings towards the couple, its silver scales glistened in the light.

“Kou-chan is an idiot!”

Culminating with that shout, the girl ran off.

The boy yelled at her to stop with an ‘Oi!’, but the girl appears to have no intention of stopping. He then sighed deeply and stood on the spot hanging his head.

Unrest sprouted in Arisu's heart. She felt like she must not leave the girl be just like this—.

“Daisuke!”

“What is it.”

“Go and bring the boy over!”

Arisu got up and chased after the girl. Daisuke eyes immediately widened.

“Wha-..... What the heck are you thinking! We have no business with those people!”

“It will be dangerous for her to run in that condition! Just do it, I’m counting on you!”

“You’ve got to be kidding me, why do I have to—”

Not heeding Daisuke’s protest, Arisu ran. As if guiding her, the Morpho butterfly flew in the direction in which the girl vanished.

She ran past the boy who just stood there motionlessly and squeezed into the walkway filled with people.

However, her footsteps stopped instantly.

“Eh.....?”

It was a mysterious scene.

In the crowded dome, a pocket of deserted space suddenly appeared.

At the centre of the space was the familiar-looking girl. The tottering steps of the girl was directed towards the ‘Horror Laboratory’ that was dyed bright green from the moss growing on the walls.

Goosebumps rose all over Arisu’s body.

“.....!”

An unsettling chill assaulted her, feeling as though there were insects crawling about on her back. Her heart thumped wildly, and all her sense were screaming at her to leave the place as far as she could.

—*Dioresutoi’s Mushi..... are just hindrances.*

Arisu widened her eyes.

A cold voice flashed through her mind like lightning. The voice sounded familiar, but also very low and devoid of any emotions.

*What was that voice just now.....? More importantly, what's with this place—.*

However, the oppressing atmosphere disappeared without warning.

Looking back, she found the girl lifting her head in wonder. She was looking up at the Morpho butterfly releasing a silver glow.

“Butterfly.....”

As if it was just an illusion, the walkway returned to its original state. The girl joined the queue for the ‘Horror Laboratory’.

Coming to her senses, Arisu lined up next to her.

“Hey, you. Are you alright?”

“Eh?”

She looked up at Arisu with tear-stained eyes. Her rotund facial structure was somewhat cute.

“W-who are you?”

“Ah, don’t be scared. I just saw you fighting with the boy just now and..... was worried for you.”

She looked at Arisu in a shock before the tears welled up in her eyes again.

“That’s right, Kou-chan yelled at me. He probably hates me now.”

“Ah, ah, please don’t cry, okay?”

Arisu promptly pacify her, barely stopping her from bawling out her face. However, she was still leaking some sobs, ready to burst into tears anytime.

Other customers began lining behind them, urging them to proceed along with the queue.

Looking up at the ‘Horror Laboratory’, Arisu’s cheeks started to cramp up. — Since young, Arisu had been afraid of the spiritual phenomena which are not affected by material means.



“H-hey? Wouldn’t it be better to for you to calm down at a different location? You see, this looks like a very scary place. I-I’ll be fine, but I’m not sure about you.”

“.....”

“Aren’t you guys a couple? In that case, I think it would be better for you two to have a composed dialogue.”

“We can no longer talk to each other.”

However, the girl did not leave the line and proceeded forwards.

“Kou-chan is going to a faraway place tomorrow.”

She said with a snuffle.

*So, that’s the case—.*

Arisu made a guess behind this small couple’s circumstances. The two have been together for some time, but the boy is going somewhere far and the two will be separated. The reason could be that his parents were moving or something like that.

Arisu stooped over with a smile and wiped away the tears welling up in the corner of the girl’s eyes.

“What’s your name?”

“It’s Isa Himeko.....”

Biting her lower lips, Himeko answered.

“Himeko-chan.”

Arisu flashed her a grin.

“.....Do you really intend to enter here? Are you sure you are not doing so in desperation?”

The girl looked up at the ‘Horror Laboratory’ palely. With each step, the entrance became more and more like a doorway to hell.

Following her gaze, Arisu’s face turned pallid as well.

“I-I’m going in.....”

“You can’t be hasty, okay. Being young as you are..... you ought to withdraw from such a fin de siècle and dangerous place as soon as possible.”

With both of her hands on the girl’s shoulder, Arisu spoke gravely. However, Himeko’s face turned into a smile instead.

“You know, this is the place where Kou-chan and I had our fateful encounter.”

“Fateful encounter?”

“It was just last year, when we were still in primary four. When I came here with father, the one who sat next to me was Kou-chan. When I was scared..... I got mixed up and grabbed onto Kou-chan accidentally. When I apologised, he just said, ‘Nevermind’, and smiled at me. The Kou-chan at that time was so, so cool! So, I immediately confessed and got his number!”

“You immediately confessed..... I see that the recent primary schoolers are extremely proactive.....”

“I was born in this world to meet Kou-chan! I was often told that I am very timid and reckless, but whenever I think that Kou-chan would be by my side always from now onwards..... I get so happy.”

Just as she said, she had a look of happiness on her face. Being gushed with talk about the power of love, Arisu was the one blushing instead.

However, a shadow came over Himeko’s expression.

“Kou-chan is a quiet but extremely kind person. Even though he always forgives anything I say..... maybe he doesn’t like me anymore? Seeing how he got so angry.....”

“What did you say to him, Himeko-chan?”

“I said that I am going to go with him together.”

Himeko said decisively, causing Arisu’s thoughts to come to a stop.

“C-can you repeat that again?”

“I told Kou-chan that I would go along with him! It’s not impossible! And I get along so well with Kou-chan’s father and mother too.....”

“That..... seems kind of impossible, isn’t it? You see, there are lots of

problems—”

About to continue, Arisu swallowed her words.

Tears starting welling in her eyes again. Watching her grit her teeth, Arisu realised it.

Himeko herself knew the absurdity of what she was suggesting. However, she probably couldn't give up on him despite knowing that.

“Kou-chan also said, that it's impossible..... But then, we'll be separated like that. I don't ever want to be separated from Kou-chan! Kou-chan too, he didn't say anything more..... surely, he must be sick of me..... Not to mention, if he knows about that secret, I'm sure that Kou-chan would.....”

Unable to hold back her tears any more as she speaks, Himeko bawled. Arisu couldn't anything other than stroke her head while holding her.

A sound rang out from pouch hanging by Himeko's waist. It was most likely the sound of her ringtone.

“You're not gonna pick up?”

In response, Himeko only pouted and averted her face. Left with no choice, Arisu opened the pouch and retrieve her mobile phone.

“Hello.”

When she pressed the button, she was greeted by, ‘.....Are you the person called Arisu?’, in a voice of a boy with his voice unbroken. This must be her boyfriend.

When asked about their present location, Arisu informed him. With that, he curtly cut the call after a, ‘I understand. I will come and fetch her.’

“He's coming to fetch you.”

Arisu said so to Himeko as she ended the call, but she still looked incensed.

Eventually, the two of them were right at the front of the queue.

Standing in front of the mossy building, Arisu and Himeko could not reply when the staff asked them to show their passes.

“H-hey? How about we at least wait until he comes?”

“I-I don’t care about Kou-chan anymore!”

“Please don’t trouble big sister like that..... please.....”

Like this, the two girls were pushed into the attraction by the snaking queue behind them with frozen expressions.



## Part 2

When they left the male changing room, Daisuke took a heavy sigh.

“Why do I have to do this..... Damn it, it’s all that stupid Arisu’s fault, sticking her neck where she doesn’t belong.”

The boy by his side lowered his head to him after keeping his mobile phone in his pocket.

“I’m so sorry for causing you all this inconvenience.”

His expression was pretty much the same, but his tone sounded very apologetic. It did not show on his face, but he must have felt quite bad. The two of them had come all the way to the male changing room to retrieve his mobile phone.

“Yea, this sure inconvenienced me all right. If you’re gonna have a fight, have it somewhere other people won’t see.”

Saying so grouchily, Daisuke walked ahead. Unlike Ena and Takako, this boy had nothing to do with his day-to-day mission. He had absolutely no reason to be courteous.

It appears that his name was Sugihara Kouta. Kouta followed after Daisuke hurriedly.

“Erm..... I’ll be alright from here on.”

“I also need to go retrieve the idiot who is together with your girl.”

“I see.”

Different from the impression of him when Daisuke saw them fighting, Kouta was rather calm, or perhaps even cold.

Arisu and the girl seemed to have joined the queue for the ‘Horror Laboratory’. Daisuke walked briskly towards their destination with no intention

of matching the boy's footsteps at all.

"If you had just chased after her then, we wouldn't have had to go through all this trouble. Why didn't you run after her straight away."

"That is....."

Kouta's tongue was tied. Maybe there was some particular reason, but he did not voice them.

Daisuke also did not really want to pursue his reason and just gave another sigh as he walked.

After walking a while in silence, Kouta asked Daisuke suddenly.

"Erm, is the person called Arisu Daisuke-san's lover?"

"I see. So, you want me finish you off right here."

When Daisuke heard his name, he had given him his as well. Seeing Daisuke crack his knuckles, Kouta flurriedly shook his head.

"N-no, thank you, if I was wrong then nevermind. It's just, if that was the case, then I have something to ask."

"Something to ask?"

"That is..... how do I patch things up with her."

"....."

"Even though we got separated like this today, I..... couldn't say anything. It was because she said something ridiculous that we ended in a fight. Because this is the first time this happened, I don't know what to do at all."

"Like hell I'd know. That has nothing to do with me, and neither am I interested. Go figure out something by yourself."

Daisuke replied grumpily.

Kouta was somewhat annoyed.

"I guess that is so, sorry for asking you. ....I'm sure you wouldn't have understood it anyway."

"I can hear you loud and clear. Or rather, did you purposely intend for me to

hear that, Huh?”

“I’m sorry, please don’t get violent.”

“So, you revealed your real nature eh, you brat.....”

The two of them glared at each other in front of the ‘Horror Laboratory’.

“In the first place, I hate wilful girls. Like that idiot Arisu, your girl seems to be one of those as well. How could I possibly understand a guy who willingly get together with such a girl.”

“She’s not wilful at all, okay. I know because I’m always with her.”

Shaking off Daisuke’s hand that is holding his neck, Kouta proceeded to enter through the entrance.

“It may be true that there are times when she just jumps into things without thinking, but..... she also thinks about various things, much more than I ever do. Just like the time she confessed to me, she can be very reckless, but she is in fact a coward at heart..... She’s the type of girl that gets uneasy whenever I’m not around with her.”

Is this guy showing off his girlfriend to me? Daisuke thought with a sneer.

“*Haah*, then why didn’t you chase after her immediately.”

“You think I didn’t want to.....!”

“What is it? Is there a reason you can’t chase her?”

Facing Daisuke who grinned provocatively, Kouta bit back his lips. He flipped back a question with a glare.

“What about you?”

“Ah?”

“Do you know anything about that person called Arisu? She may hold some secrets that you are unaware of for all you know. Aren’t you also not trying to find out about them?”

He questioned Daisuke in a tone unlike that of a primary schooler.

—*There are plenty of things that you wouldn’t know if you do not speak out.*



Daisuke recalled Arisu's words and the face of his war buddy who had betrayed the SEPB, Aki. But, with a mocking smile on his face, those thoughts disappeared.

"Ha, lame."

".....You're probably just jealous yourself because you do not have a girlfriend."

"Like I was saying, I hear you just loud and fine."

"I'm sorry, please don't raise your hands towards a kid."

"You this snotty brat....."

Releasing his hand from the boy's neck, Daisuke headed to join the queue.

However, his feet stopped.

All of a sudden, a chilly gale assaulted him.

*What is this—.*

A sense of insects crawling up his body assailed him, causing a chill to run down his back.

Kouta's countenance too changed dramatically. His face was frozen in fear, turning deathly pale.

"Hey, somehow, it feels extremely scary all of a sudden..... Let's not enter?"

"There's probably a breakdown. It feels kind of off-putting. Let's go somewhere else."

The people making up the queue left in droves.

In a matter of moments, the people in the surroundings all left. It was as if there was an invisible wall placed over here, creating an empty pocket of space.

".....!"

A vast green fog seemed to be wrapped around the mossy building. The green fog coalesced into a single form with a long torso—into a silhouette that resembled a millipede.



The only ones who saw it were Daisuke and Kouta. All the other people had either left, or were facing the other side from the building, none looking in this direction.

*A Special Type Mushi.....? Is its host inside here?*

Daisuke had reflexively moved his hand over to his pouch. There was only his usual mission-use goggles stored inside the waterproof pouch. For an instant, he hesitated over whether to retrieve his weapon back at the changing room.

*No, a weapon would be ineffective against a Special Type. ....Not to mention, this one seems to be especially troublesome—.*

A figure dashed past Daisuke who was running simulations in his mind. It was Kouta.

“Himeko.....!”

“You idiot, wait up! Inside, there’s a—”

The staffs tried to instruct the people with a, ‘C-currently, we’re experiencing a malfunction.....!’ But, with him crouched on the ground, he did not stop the two from entering.

The insides of the building led to a dark tunnel. It appears that people were meant to ride on a rail car that lay on a track submerged in water.

Kouta leapt into the water without batting an eye. Creating splashing sound, he ran through the shallow waters into the dark tunnel.

Daisuke chased after him, clutching his shoulder to bring him to a stop.

“Didn’t I tell you to wait! You go wait outside!”

“I have to stop Himeko or else.....!”

When he turned around, Kouta had a desperate look as he spoke.

Daisuke’s expression changed.

“Stop.....? What do you mean?”

As Daisuke questioned him, an unpleasant premonition spread in his heart.

## Part 3

“It’s alright, Arisu. They’re just made-up objects, that’s all. Ghosts are just a figment of imagination made up by mankind; wouldn’t it be weird to fear something which doesn’t even exist. Indeed, that’s just weird. It’s totally weird that your heart is thumping so hard it’s about to burst out.”

Staring into the darkness that propagated in front of her, Arisu murmured to herself.

“Please wait a moment while our staff checks the safety bar.”

Arisu and Himeko sat next to each other aboard the rail car. The rail car had four seats, two in front and two at the back. Arisu and Himeko were in the front seats.

Seeing the young girl seated next to her, Arisu braced herself. Being the elder one, there was no way she can appear to be scared.

“A-are you alright, Himeko-chan?”

She asked the girl in a shrill voice.

But, she did not receive a response.

“Himeko-chan?”

She called out once more. With that, Himeko got up with a jump and raised her pale face.

“Y-yes! I’m fine?”

Himeko tried to raise a smile, but her expression was stiff. Arisu began to worry.

“Are you sure? If you are so scared, there’s no need to go out of the way to ride something like this.”

“.....I want to get strong.”

“.....?”

“The more I like Kou-chan..... the more we are together, the more afraid I am. Afraid that someday, Kou-chan will grow to dislike me. I keep liking Kou-chan more and more, but Kou-chan is always the same. I’m afraid to ascertain Kou-chan’s feelings.....”

Biting her lips, Himeko clutched her fists tightly atop her laps.

“The more I like him, the more scared I become. I don’t want that! That’s why I must become stronger.....! Even though I got this power because I wanted to become stronger..... But, whenever I get scared, the power spontaneously.....!”

“Power.....?”

“I must get stronger no matter what. If I get scared, that thing will..... If I get stronger enough that this place no longer scares me anymore, then..... And then, Kou-chan will also—”

Himeko drooped her head with teary eyes, as if she was desperately trying to hold back her fear. At this point, Arisu began to regret boarding this ride just as Himeko wanted.

“I’m sorry, please let us alight—”

Arisu’s voice was cut off by the buzzer signalling the start of the ride. The rail car gradually picked up speed.

The dim surroundings revealed a laboratory that fell into disuse. On both sides of the track, there were broken desks and blood-stained laboratory coats lying haphazardly.

It happened right after the rail car accelerated and made a curve.

*“Kyaah!”*

Along with the deafening noise of glass breaking, a rotting corpse dressed in a lab coat fell down from the ceiling. Arisu involuntarily screamed loudly in terror.

Only after they passed the doll of the corpse did Arisu realised.

“H-H-Himeko-chan? Are you alright?”

Turning to look at her, Arisu found her in a daze with her eyes wide open. She

seemed to have been so shocked that she could not even raise a scream.

“Himeko-chan!”

As she shook her, Himeko’s expression twisted. Her shoulders shuddered, and large beads of tears fell down her face.

“Kou-..... chan.....”

Himeko opened her mouth widely.

“Kou-chaaan!”

Green fog spilled out from Himeko’s entire body as she screamed.

“.....!”

Arisu’s breathing stopped for a second.

The emergency brake for the rail car activated.

The green fog enveloped the rapidly decelerating rail car.

The fog eventually formed into a silhouette of a large insect with a long body—a millipede with its jaws gaping wide at the passengers.

“.....!”

The moment the millipede passed through her, Arisu felt goosebumps rising all over her body. An uncontrollable terror likened to falling off a cliff besieged her.

The screams of the passengers echoed in the darkness. The moment a scream terminated, it was immediately followed by another.

Arisu too felt like she was going to shriek again.

A baseless terror.

A fear which targeted the instincts slashed at Arisu’s body like blades.

“No—”

Just as she was about to let out another scream.

“!”

A silver light shined upon Arisu.

It was the Morpho butterfly.

Brilliant silver scales descended on Arisu.

As if blown away by the silver scales, the green fog around her dissipated.

“Ah.....”

Seeing the Morpho butterfly circling around her, Arisu came to her senses.

Although slow, the rail car was progressing forwards nonetheless. But, all the props placed in the darkness were covered by the green fog and could not be seen. The passengers at the rear seats were all knocked out without exception.

“Himeko-chan—”

About to call out to her, Arisu gasped.

A large green millipede was coiled around Himeko's petite body. Arisu instantly tried to pull it away, but her hands only went through it.

“T-this is..... a Mushi?”

Mushi are categorised into various types. Mushi that fused with their owner like Arisu and Daisuke are Fusion Types, while Mushi with a corporeal body are known as Minion Types, and those without a physical body are known as Special Types. Arisu had previously met a Mushitsuki with the same type of Mushi called Yomori Neiko.

“Himeko-chan..... you are a Mushitsuki?”

“Please.....”

In a position where she clung onto the safety bar, Himeko moved her quivering lips. Her eyes that were staring down at her laps were losing consciousness but still opened widely.

“Don't tell Kou-chan..... If he knows that I am a Mushitsuki..... Kou-chan would hate me..... If that happens, I will.....”

Her eyes slowly closed.

“I.....!”

The millipede wrapped around her body screeched. It flew off towards the

front like a bullet, spewing green fog along with it.

Unable to comprehend the situation, Arisu only watch as the millipede disappear into the distance blankly.

“.....”

And then, the figure of a person appeared in the fog.

*That’s, impossible—.*

Arisu could only stare speechlessly at the person who appeared in bewilderment.

“I never wanted this power!”

Himeko’s shout drummed heavily in Arisu’s ear.

The figure that appeared in the fog fluttered gently.

Lowering itself towards Arisu who sat in the rail car was a girl in a pure white hospital garb—.

“Ma-..... ri.....?”

The girl which placed both of her hands on Arisu’s cheeks smiled.



## Part 4

Standing enshrouded by the fog, the only thing they could see was a track running into the fog.

Taking a deep gulp of breath, Daisuke plunged his head under water. He placed his ear by the track.

*"Puhaa.....* The rail car seems to still be moving. The track is still vibrating."

He emerged from the water and spoke as he turned around.

There, he saw Kouta shivering with a pale look. The green fog entwining around his legs almost looked like millipedes.

Clicking his tongue, Daisuke unhesitatingly slapped the boy.

*".....! That hurts!"*

*"Are you awake now?"*

With those cold words, Daisuke glared at the boy who was holding his cheek. The millipede wrapped around his legs reverted into fog.

*"When did you realised."*

Kouta knotted his eyebrows at Daisuke's question.

*"You said that that Himeko girl is a Mushitsuki. When did you realised?"*

*".....It was just recently. I only saw the Mushi when I was with her, I never would have thought....."*

Kouta spoke, not bothering to use honorific language any longer.

*"So, knowing that she was a Mushitsuki made you scared? No, you were definitely afraid. The fact that you didn't chase her just now was also because you couldn't get over that."*

It seems that Daisuke hit the mark. Kouta struggled for words and glared at

Daisuke.

“That has nothing to do with you, right.”

“No, it does. If you had just reported her to the police out of fear, the information would have automatically been passed down to us as orders. In that case, we could have secured her at an earlier stage.”

“Secured.....?”

Kouta’s expression changed.

“Who the hell are you.....? What are you intending to do with her!”

Daisuke stretched his hand out into the fog. The hard sensation he felt must have been the wall. He was practically blind in this fog.

*This is bad, the Mushi is going berserk..... Will I make it in time if I chase them now?*

As he deliberated over what to do, Daisuke looked into the tunnel.

Arisu is next to Himeko’s side. The Morpho butterfly entrusted to her by Hanashiro Mari is powerful, but there are many unknowns to it. It would probably be best to expect that she cannot handle this situation.

Right at this moment, Daisuke’s heartbeat continued to rise. A chill that felt as if the scythe of the grim reaper was held at his throat riddled him.

“A mental manipulation, no, a mental erosion type, is it. Is this emotion ‘fear’? An ability that gives rise to terror in humans..... How troublesome.”

Daisuke followed the rail tracks.

“Oi! I’m asking you what are you intending to do to Himeko—”

The hand that Kouta placed on Daisuke’s shoulder was violently swatted off by him.

“Special Type Mushitsuki—especially those with this kind of abilities are extremely dangerous. Not only to other, but also to themselves.”

“Wha-.....”

“*Shinpu*..... The bastard that gives rise to Special Type Mushitsuki enjoys

instigating people to be possessed by Mushi. Also, most of them are unable to fully control those powers, especially those with abilities which can manipulate the mind. These host are often shown what they fear they the most. If their power continues to get stronger without training, it is only a matter of time before they self-destruct.”

Before Kouta who stared at him in surprise, Daisuke opened his waist pouch. From there, he retrieved a mechanical goggle and equipped it.

“I am going to secure that girl you call Himeko. Don’t get in my way.”

The sight of the grinning Daisuke must have scared him and Kouta bit his lips.

“You..... Are you really the same person as just now.....”

Daisuke perked up his head.

The movement of the fog was weird. It was being accumulating inside the tunnel as if being absorbed.

“Does it still have some other ability?”

Perking his ears, Daisuke could hear the sound of something running in the water.

A shadowy figure appeared from within the dense fog.

Daisuke’s face twisted slightly.

The one that emerged from the fog was a person completely decked out in black. The coat with belts all over was awfully familiar to Daisuke. Their legs, arms and finally a pair of red spots came into view.

The red spots came from the goggles that covered the majority of his face. It was the exact same model as the one Daisuke wore currently. On one hand of the figure with a devil-like smile was a large handgun.

That person was someone who should not have been around—someone that could never have come face-to-face with Daisuke.

“What’s with you, keeping quiet all of a sudden.....”

As if he couldn’t see the person in front, Kouta looked at Daisuke suspiciously.

Daisuke closed his eyes tranquilly.

He had practiced intensively in keeping his mind calm and clear. He maintained a void in his mind that swallowed all anxiety, fear, anger and any other emotions.

“So, this is another effect that comes from amplifying the fear in people’s heart. This would probably have a great effect on normal people. But—”

Daisuke opened his eyes and glared at the person in front with a strong gaze.

“It’s useless. I won’t be affected by this kind of attacks.”

The person in black coat burst and reverted into fog.

The surroundings returned into silence.

Daisuke breathed out and glanced at Kouta who stood there in a stupor.

“Since something tried to attack me, there’s a high chance that they will target you as well. It may be dangerous to just chase them like this..... *Kakkou!*”

A green insect landed on the arm that Daisuke held out. It was a Cleridae with antennas several times the length of its body.

The Cleridae transformed. It expanded into countless feelers that fused with Daisuke’s body.

“Wha-.....!”

Before the dumbfounded Kouta, Daisuke’s body was covered by a green pattern.

“The exit should be at the other side of the building. We’re going to circle around there first!”

Daisuke raised his fist towards the wall.

However, right then, Kouta seemed to have noticed something and raised his face. What he was looking at was beyond the fog in the tunnel.

Daisuke could not see anything, but he seemed to have. His eyes widened to the size of marbles.

“Himeko.....?”

*Is it too late—.*

Daisuke clenched his teeth.

## Part 5

Himeko grasped the bar tightly as she murmured.

“I don’t need this kind of power.....”

Mari was right in front of Arisu.

Floating in the air, her face was only a few centimetres away from Arisu’s.

“A power that causes fear in people..... a power that shows what a person fear most is.....!”

Arisu widened her eyes.

*A power that shows what a person fear most—.*

She stared back at the smiling Mari.

*Does this mean that I fear Mari.....?*

Staring at the truth that she could not even imagine, Arisu shuddered.

“Mari.....”

Mari slowly moved her lips.

*—Hey Arisu, listen to me. I am.....*

With a jump, Arisu’s expression froze.

On that day.

The words that Mari spoke on the last day Arisu saw her alive.

What was it that Mari wanted to say?

What was it that Mari wanted to tell Arisu?

“Kou-chan..... Kou-chaan.....”

She heard the voice of Himeko cowering.

*—I'm afraid to ascertain Kou-chan's feelings.....*

Arisu came to a start.

"I....."

I am afraid to ascertain Mari's feelings..... her dream?





She bit her lips.

*—I am actually.....*

The Mari in front of her smiled.

Arisu's face twisted.

Her hastening heartbeat was not due to Himeko's ability. It was unquestionably due to the fear of hearing the words that followed from Mari.

For the sake of ascertaining Mari's feelings—in order to find out why did Mari entrusted the Morpho butterfly to her, she had fought her way till now.

Mari was Arisu's dear friend.

However, what was she to Mari?

Why was it that Mari never told Arisu anything while she was alive?

Was it because she couldn't reveal the fact that she was a Mushitsuki?

The smile of the imaginary Mari distorted.

*—Because Arisu is kind..... you will definitely listen to my request, right?*

She felt as though her heart stopped.

".....!"

The heart drummed loudly in her chest with dokun, dokun.

What did Mari thought about Arisu?

A dear friend?

Or perhaps, was she going to make use of her for some ulterior motives —.

"Kou-..... chan....."

She heard Himeko's weak voice.

Arisu regained her senses and turned towards Himeko. Her cheeks were

flushed, and her head drooped strengthlessly.

She must have overused her power. In exchange for using the power of the Mushi, their host will have their dream and psyche gnawed away.

If this continues, Himeko will have her dream completely consumed and lose her life.

Death—what that word brought up was none other than thoughts of her deceased close friend, Hanashiro Mari.

“Mari.....!”

Arisu looked back at the illusionary Mari.

The Morpho butterfly gave off a silver light.

Its wings morphed into feelers that combined with Arisu’s body and the safety handle bar. The ends of the bar snapped off from the rail car, transforming into a spear in an instant.

Arisu held the spear and stood up on the seat.

“I’m sorry, Mari..... I may have been afraid of finding out the truth all these times.”

The Mari she turned to made a sad expression.

Arisu is the same as Himeko.

She must become stronger than she ever was. At least till she is able to ascertain Mari’s true feelings.

Before she gets stronger, she has no choice other than to believe.

Arisu was connected to Mari through the Morpho butterfly. She would definitely find out the answer that connects the past to the future.

“But, I still..... want to know. No matter what you were truly thinking, I will accept your wishes without fail.....!”

Silver light spilled from the spear.

—Arisu.....

Engulfed by the gust of silver scales, the illusory Mari disappeared.

What appeared in return was a large millipede. It was Himeko's Mushi.

Arisu hesitated.

The power of the spear was most likely effective even against the millipede that lack a corporeal form. Arisu surmised this from how the Morpho butterfly had protected her against the millipede all this while.

However, if she were to eliminate the Mushi in front of her, its host, Himeko would—.

Right at that moment.

An explosion occurred at the tracks in front of the rail car.

Although she could not see through the fog, the wall must have been broken down from the side.

"Himeko!"

Two figures appeared from within the fog that was blown away by the explosion.

The one in front was the boy who is Himeko's boyfriend. With a start, the limp figure of Himeko shook.

The other was a youth covered in a green pattern. He moved onto the track with speedy movement, prepping up his hands.

"Daisuke!"

"We mustn't let this thing go outside. I'm going to stop it!"

Saying so, he stood before the rail car.

"W-wait a second—"

Ignoring the flustered Arisu, he grabbed the rail car with his hands. Although their speed had already been falling, with Daisuke's otherworldly arm strength, the sound of metal screeching could be heard.

The rail car eventually came to a stop, along with a burnt smell.

*“Kyaah!”*

*“Uwaah!”*

When the rail car came to a complete stop, Arisu who was standing on the seat fell over Daisuke due to the momentum.

“Y-you idiot! Why didn’t you step aside!”

“S-shut up! Couldn’t you have thought of a gentler way to stop the car?”

The sound of water splashing passed by the entangled Daisuke and Arisu.

It was Kouta.

He ran towards the trembling Himeko.

“Himeko.....”

But, she did not raise her head. She must have been terrified to find out what Kouta thought now that he knew that she was a Mushitsuki.

“You know what, I—”

“I-It’s impossible!”

Cutting off his words, Himeko shouted.

“I tried to get strong enough such that I would no longer get scared, but..... it’s impossible. I can’t do anything without Kou-chan.....”

Her quivering voice was tinged with sobs. Tears fell onto her laps without stopping.

“I want to be together with Kou-chan forever..... I can’t stand it, for us to be separated.....”

Looking at her, Kouta seemed like he wanted to say something. But, he could not make out any words and only kept silent.

Unconsciously, Arisu’s tried to open her mouth. However, she could not think of what to say either and just bit her lips.

The two staring at each other reminded her of the past her and Mari.

If she had known that they could no longer meet each other, what could she have said at that time?

As she did not know that, she could not think of what to say to those two.

“She.....”

The low voice echoed in the dark tunnel.

Surprisingly, the one who broke the silence was Daisuke.

“Daisuke?”

Arisu turned to look at Daisuke who was pinned underneath her. Collapsed in the water, he spoke tiresomely.

“Doesn’t she just need a promise.”

Kouta looked at Daisuke in surprise.

“There seems to be some things that can’t be conveyed without words.”

Arisu too stared at him in wonder. She thought for sure that he would just apprehend Himeko who was a Mushitsuki without words. With a glum look, he added, ‘I am going to take her to the SEPB now. Don’t regret not saying whatever you want to say now.’

Kouta deliberated in silence for a while before turning back to face Himeko.

“Himeko..... I met you on the way towards here.”

“.....!”

“Daisuke mentioned that whatever you see is an illusion of what you fear the most.”

Himeko’s sobs stopped abruptly. Looking at her from the side, it appears that even her breathing had stopped.

“I was so scared..... when the you that appeared before me said this.”

Kouta clenched his fist.

“She said, ‘Bye bye’.”

Himeko’s expression changed. She lifted her tear-stained face.

“When I knew that you were a Mushitsuki, truthfully, I was a bit frightened. But..... much more than that, I was afraid of being separated from you. I will be going somewhere far away, and you will also be going through some tough

moments, but..... I'll try my best to meet you as much as possible.”

Scratching his head bashfully, Kouta spoke.

“That’s why, wait for me. I want to always be with you.”

“.....”

Himeko started to cry once again. However, contrary to before, her lips were curved into a smile this time.

“Kou-chan!”

Himeko jumped onto Kouta and hugged him. And he reciprocated with a bitter smile.

—After a few more minutes passed, the tunnel returned to silence.

The two of them must have been exhausted, as they fell into slumber on the seat.

“Just what happened to you, Daisuke. Saying all those things unlike you.”

“That was nothing.”

In response to Arisu’s question with a smile, Daisuke averted his face with a disgruntled look on his face as expected.

Having contacted the SEPB, they would be arriving in a short moment for cleanup measures. Arisu did not really understand, but it would be troublesome if the police arrived before they did.

“Hey, that child’s power shows what someone fear the most, right? What did you see?”

At her question, Daisuke remained reticent for a while. But, a while later, he uttered.

“It was myself.”

“Eh?”

“It seems that *Kakkou* is hated not only by others, but also abhorred by himself.”

Daisuke laughed in self-mockery.

*—Those of us may eventually have our dreams completely consumed and our Mushi mature.*

Arisu recalled the words he spoke the other day.

“It seems that you need to get stronger too. More than you are now.”

“Shut up.”

The smiling Arisu was glared at by Daisuke.

“Can I say something too?”

“I’m not telling what I saw.”

“No, that isn’t it.....”

“Fine then, what is it?”

“.....When do you intend to get off me.....?”

In a position with half of his body submerged, Daisuke asked.

“I feel like I’m always getting pinned under you no matter what happens.....”

Arisu, who was sitting on top his waist, grinned.

“It feels surprisingly comfortable to sit.”

“Get off already, you’re heavy—”

“A chair shouldn’t be talking, right? Right?”

A large number of footsteps could be heard as bubbles emerged from Daisuke’s head underwater.

# Episode 07. The Ripples Reflecting the Dream

The faces of Ichinokuro Arisu, Saionji Ena and Kujou Takako lined on top of one other with quailing looks.

“.....”

Ena crouched her body on the ground, while Takako rested above her. Above them was Arisu who leaned her body forwards, staring beyond the door into the room darkened by blackout curtains.

Above Arisu's head was a signpost with the words, 'Arts Room 2'. And affixed to that sign hanging was another signboard that read, 'The Fortune-telling Society's 100% Accurate Divination Booth'.

At the backs of Arisu and the girls who were peeking into the room, a bustling scene was depicted beyond the windows. Large crowds of people made their way around students dressed in mascot costumes, visiting the wide plethora of stands.

However, it was a separate world in the Arts room.

Blackout curtains completely covered the windows, plunging the room into darkness. Colourful tapes decorated one side of the lengthy wall, along with (hopefully fake) bones of unknown origins.

A single small desk was placed in the centre of the room. A crystal ball sat atop the desk covered with black tablecloth, and two person sat on the chair. — More specifically, *two* person were seated on one chair.

“I'm overjoyed at your visit after such a long time. *Lick Lick*”





A girl with a black cloth (probably a mantle?) draped over her uniform licked the neck of the boy which was wrapped with her hands.

“.....Don’t lick my neck!”

The cheeks of the youth with the girl seated atop his laps—Kusuriya Daisuke, had a spasm.

“Hey, show me all about *Kakkun* again. *Nibble Nibble*”

“.....Don’t nibble my earlobe!”

“By the way, what was today’s business again? *Kiss*”

“.....Didn’t I just tell you.....”

Daisuke was seated on the chair, and the girl in the mantle sat atop his laps. When Arisu’s eyes got used to the darkness, she could see that there was something (she wanted to call it a collar, but common sense rejected that option) placed around her neck.

“.....”

Arisu softly closed the door.

With hollow expressions, the three girls averted their faces from the room.

“Arisu..... I’m sorry, but I need to leave first.....”

“.....My apologies, me too.....”

Ena and Takako walked down the corridor shakily as if they received a shock. Arisu could do nothing but watch them go in a daze.

“Indeed..... I thought that I shouldn’t avert my eyes from reality and do my best to face everything directly, but..... only this time, I don’t think I can do it.....”

“—More, more, *Kakkun*..... *Lick*—”

Hearing the sweet voice coming from within the room, Arisu trembled in dread.

## Part 1

Under the clear skies, a buoyant music wafted through the air.

The moment one walked passed the gaudily decorated school gate, they would be faced with the specially installed stage. The band on stage was probably a recreational one formed by students as the accompaniment did not match the tempo of the vocals, but even so, the music still created a jovial atmosphere.

Long tents were positioned along the school building, where assorted signposts were placed before them at regular intervals. Most of them sold food and beverages, but there were also game stalls such as a shooting range.

In addition to the students in uniform, there were a lot of people in casual clothing as well. They mostly consist of students from other schools as well as nearby residents. They mingled along with students handing out fliers as well as the costumed mascots advertising their respective stalls.

Arisu, Ena and Takako had come here to the Private Honami University Affiliated Middle School's cultural festival.

"Hey, Arisu! They're having a frisbee tournament at the field. Wanna join with me? We'll sweep home all the prizes!"

Ena, dressed in a punkrock style wearing a hole-ridden jeans and skirt lined with chains, coupled with a jacket and wristbands, pulled Arisu's arm. In her hand was a pamphlet that she got from the organising committee tent just now.

"Frisbee, huh. With your fearsome dexterity, I fear that you might really dominate the game."

Holding a drink on one hand, Arisu laughed. The miniskirt, jacket and boots she was decked out in were all overseas branded goods.

"Arisu-san. It is bad manners to eat and drink while walking, you know."

Takako opined to Arisu while walking with her hands behind her back. The casual wear she was in was a rare sight, a combination of hot pants with a cardigan and leg warmers.

“Speaking of which, Arisu..... isn’t the colour of that drink out of the world? I wonder just what did they put in. Even I wouldn’t dare to try that.”

“It’s surprisingly good, though. Not to mention, didn’t you just wolf down that charred-black yakisoba just now, Ena.”

“Yea, it was really burnt to a crisp. Well, but that’s how you’re supposed to enjoy the festival food. Aren’t you gonna eat anything, Takako?”

“Erm, I don’t really like this kind of food..... By the way, isn’t it about the time to meet up with Daisuke-san?”

Reminded by Takako’s words, Arisu looked up at the clock installed on the school building. As she mentioned, there were barely any time left before the appointed three o’clock.

“You’re right. Well then, I’ll see you guys in a bit. I’ll contact you when I’m done.”

“Hey, can we really not follow along? I’m kind of interested in Kusuriya-kun’s acquaintance as well. It’ll be fine if we just accompany you to the meet up place, right? Please?”

“Nope..... Well, if it’s only until there then it’s fine I guess. So, you guys coming along?”

“I wonder what kind of person Daisuke-san’s acquaintance is.”

They walked across the lively festivities and entered the school building. After changing for the indoor slippers, they walked down the corridor packed with each individual class’ attraction.

The location that Daisuke had specified seems to be in the building next door. The three girls proceeded down the corridor lined with signboards.

Outside of the window, an out-of-season Morpho butterfly flitted along at the back of the three girls near the ceiling.

“Hey hey, what should I do if that friend is a girl? Or even worse, if they’re not

just friends, but share a deep relationship..... Ah, I don't think I will be able to recover from that.”

Clinging onto Arisu’s arm, Ena moaned towards the heavens exaggeratedly. Takako laughed in response.

“It might be that he wants to introduce his girlfriend to Arisu-san.”

“*Ah!* No way! That can’t be, Kusuriya-kun is our property!”

“Who knows, maybe she might be his fiancée?”

“*Nooo!* That can’t be!”

“*Ufufu*, what if they’re already married.”

“*Hiii!* .....Or rather, that can’t be the case. Takako, do you really enjoy seeing people suffer that much.....?”

Kusuriya Daisuke. The freeloader at the Ichinokuro house.

Arisu had not come here to the Private Honami University Affiliated Middle School to have fun at their cultural festival. It was to meet with one of Daisuke’s acquaintance. That person was a student at this school.

She did not hear the specifics from him, but he did mention that the person was ‘someone with a few screws loose in their head’.

“I don’t think their lovers. He did say that they are not even friends.”

Ena and Takako looked at Arisu questioningly at her words.

“Eh? Really?”

“That sounds somewhat forlorn.”

They proceeded down the corridor on the second floor and headed towards the special classroom block.

Different from near the school gate or the field, this block seemed to be quite devoid of people. There was still the presence of people on the first floor which was connected to the gym, but the second and third floors were completely silent.

“.....Hey, Ena. Is it really this way?”

“The second Arts room, right? This is the right way. ....I do wonder why the surroundings are so deserted though.”

“That must be it.”

The place Takako pointed to was the deepest and darkest area.

“.....”

An awkward silence descended amongst the three of them.

There was indeed a sign that read, ‘Arts Room 2’. However, affixed to that sign hanging was another signboard that read, ‘The Fortune-telling Society’s 100% Accurate Divination Booth’.

The door was covered by blackout curtains, and a black curtain was drawn over half of the corridor’s window.

It was as if only that area was isolated in darkness.

“W-will you be alright, Arisu? There’s some kind of abnormal atmosphere around here.”

“It’s eerily quiet over here.”

“L-let’s check it out for now. We’ll all look at once, okay. D-don’t leave me alone here, please.”

The three girls took a gulp and stood in front of the blackout curtain. With Ena at the bottom, Takako in the middle, and Arisu at the top, the three of them drew back the curtain along with the door.

Inside, they saw Daisuke’s ‘acquaintance’.

“I’m overjoyed at your visit after such a long time. *Lick Lick*”

“.....”

All expression disappeared from the girls’ faces.

Hit by a sense of giddiness, Arisu recalled the events that led up to this situation.

## Part 2

In the main building of the Ichinokuro house, one of the many spare rooms belonged to Kusuriya Daisuke.

“There’s something we need to speak about, Daisuke. I’m coming in.”

Without even waiting for an answer, Arisu, dressed in pyjamas, opened the paper sliding door.

Daisuke was in the middle of a call. Everything about him, from his hairstyle to his facial features, screamed average. He took a glimpse towards her and sighed.

[Other than *Nene-san*, there’s also many others whom he intends to bring into our branch. Would you like to speak with Branch Director Haji himself? I’ll connect you right away. While waiting, how about some calming music?  
*La~lala~la~*]

An excessively boisterous voice came from his mobile phone such that it even reached Arisu.

“Rather than those people, tell him that we need to change the reception of the intelligence team, *Maimai*. .....I’ll contact you again later, cutting now.”

[*Lala~la~*. Ah, yessir, I’ll pass that on. ....Hmm? Wouldn’t I lose my position if they are new members entering the intelligence team. But, *don’t mind, Maimai-chan*. If you continue working hard, surely a bright future awaits—]

Daisuke ended the call, cutting off the annoying voice abruptly.

“Somehow, I feel like I just heard the most individualistic person of all times. Is that your friend?”

“Please don’t joke about that. That was just a colleague. How do I put this..... It’s not like I’m referring to all of them, but there’s a large number of weirdos amongst the Special Type Mushitsuki, there’s also some crazy ones too.....”

“That’s quite a stereotype. Aren’t you just discriminating them?”

“—Rather than that, what do you want to speak about. And also, learn how to knock at least.”

With a serious expression, Arisu sat in front of Daisuke who had a look of exasperation.

“I want to borrow your assistance. —Ah, saying it like that makes it sounds like I’m the one with a lower standing. Let me rephrase that, you shall assist me. You shall put in all your efforts for my sake.”

“.....Well, it’s not like I expected your attitude to change after all these times anyway. So, what’s with this all of a sudden.”

“After what happened at the pool, I came to thought. There really are many different kinds of power that Mushitsuki have.”

*Mushi*—.

Referring to monsters which remains to be whispered as rumours amongst the people despite the official denial of their existence by the government.

The Mushi feeds on the dreams of people in order to grow. The people possessed by them are referred to as *Mushitsuki*, gaining the use of various different kinds of power in exchange for their dreams.

The young Mushitsuki girl that Arisu met at the indoor pool facility the other day had the ability to instill fear in people.

Kusuriya Daisuke too was a Mushitsuki. Apart from him, Arisu had also met many other Mushitsuki, each with a different ability.

“And so, I thought. You have been in the organisation..... the SEPB, which has a lot of Mushitsuki, for a long time, isn’t it? In that case, wouldn’t you possibly know of a Mushitsuki with the ability to find out about Mari?”

The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

That was the organisation that Daisuke belonged to, a governmental agency that was established to capture Mushitsuki. Hanashiro Mari—the original owner of the Morpho butterfly that was now entrusted to Arisu, is the reason for which Daisuke is monitoring Arisu.



“.....There’s no way anyone with such a convenient ability exists. From the very start—”

Replying to Arisu who was pressing him for an answer, Daisuke paused. He seemed to have recalled something, but continued with a puckering expression.

“—there’s no such person.”

“.....Just now, you were lying very blatantly, Daisuke.”

“.....”

He averted his face without speaking.

Arisu stood up wordlessly and grabbed the still seated Daisuke’s arm. Pulling the right arm of Daisuke who had a look of question, she flipped him over in one fluid motion.

“And there. *Arisu Upper Cross Armlock~!*”

“.....*Guaah!*”

“How dare you feign ignorance to your master’s queries, inexcusable! If you don’t spit out what you know in three seconds, prepare to hold your chopsticks with your left hand from tomorrow onwards! *One, two.....*”

## Part 3

“—More, more, *Kakkun*..... *Lick*—”

With her fingertips on the door, Arisu hesitated over whether to open the door or not. She had a feeling that if she were to open it now, she would witness something that she mustn't.

Ena and Takako had already abandoned her with pale faces.

“W-what should I do..... That was Daisuke, right? Eh? What? Are they in that kind of relationship? Showing me that kind of thing, what am I supposed to do? Should I report it to the police—”

While she muttered to herself in a frenzy, the door opened all of a sudden.

A grimacing Daisuke stood in front of her. The other girl was clinging onto his neck with a beaming smile.

“.....If you're going to enter, do it quickly.”

“.....Yes.”

Arisu answered meekly with a nod.

—The Arts room devoid of tables and chairs was quite spacious.

However, as the windows were completely covered by blackout curtains, one could not see well in the room. The only illumination in the room came from the lamp hanging on the wall. On top of the table in the middle of the room, there was what appears to a basin of water.

*“Hustle Hustle Hustle”*

Leaving behind the silent Daisuke and Arisu, the girl headed to a door deeper in the room.

*“Creak”*

She opened the door and retrieved two more chairs.

*“Hustle Hustle Hustle”*

She placed the chairs in front of Arisu and Daisuke.

*“Thunk .....Please have a seat. Turn Hustle Hustle Hustle”*

Flapping her mantle, the girl returned to the black table and sat on her own chair.

Arisu stared at Daisuke with imploring eyes.

*“.....Daisuke-.....”*

*“.....Don’t say a word. That's just the kind of person.....”*

The girl just stared at Arisu without appearing to do anything.

*“Grin”*

The ends of her lips went up. She just continued to stare at Arisu while occasionally mumbling, *‘Grin Grin’*.

She had a very distinct hairstyle, with straight bangs in addition to hairstyle of different lengths on the left and right sides. Her hair above her right ears was cut shortly and tied, while her hair on the left side stretched till her waist. The star-shaped stickers pasted below her left eye glittered from the light from the lamp.

Arisu thought that the girl would look quite cute if she did not speak.

However, all that was ruined by the black mantle she wore, the collar-like choker on her neck, and most of all—the artificial smile that could not be described in any other way apart from a grin. All of it was worsened by the murky gloom in her eyes that almost seemed to lick Arisu caught in her gaze.

Feeling a chill, Arisu shivered. It was not just her appearance. She could feel a queerness not found in normal people coming from the girl.

“Kurisaka Ayuyu. A member of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau Central Headquarters, Secret Class Rank 4 of the Experimental team, *Kororo*.  
.....Even if I mentioned that, it’s not like you would know that anyway.”

*“You may call Ayuyu~ as Ayuyu~. Bobs head”*

Ayuyu took a bow towards Arisu. However, she immediately shook her head.

*"Shake Shake* You can't after all. The only one who can call *Ayuyu~ Ayuyu~* is *Kakkun*. Please call me *Ayuyu*."

With another, *'Grin'*, the ends of her lips rose again.

".....N-nice to meet you."

Arisu did not know how to reply her and just returned a stiff smile.

"—I'll leave the rest to you, *Kororo*."

"Don't be so cold, *Kakkun*. Just call me *Ayuyu~*."

"Wait a minute!"

Arisu clung on desperately to Daisuke who got up to leave. Glimpsing at Ayuyu to the side, she whispered to Daisuke softly.

"W-where are you going, Daisuke.....! Are you going to leave me alone with that girl? What do you want me to do? What are you aiming for? I'll apologise for stealing your side dish this morning.....! Getting back at me like this is too much!"

"Calm down. And don't cry. ....Didn't you say that you want to meet with a Mushitsuki with the ability to find out about Hanashiro Mari."

"I-it's this girl.....? Really?"

"Yea. I don't really know what would actually happen either, but....."

His expression turned sharp. Catching a glance at Ayuyu, he spoke in a low voice.

"Be careful. Apart from her ability..... watch out for her as well."

"W-what do you mean?"

"I'll be nearby this room. If anything happens, just shout for me immediately. I've also brought my equipment just in case. I'll rush over straight away."

"Equipment? Why would you need that thing?"

Without answering Arisu, Daisuke turned towards Ayuyu with a strict countenance.

“Don’t do anything unnecessary, *Kororo*. If you engage in some meaningless ‘play’, I will.....”

“No need for worries. I will keep to our promise. *Grin*”

However, the nodding Ayuyu was still staring intently at Arisu. Feeling manacled by the stare, Arisu felt a chill run down her back.

Daisuke glared at Ayuyu for a while before leaving the room without saying anything.

Right after he closed the door behind him, silence descend in the room.

Arisu and Ayuyu stared at each other in silence. When Arisu gulped, Ayuyu just continued staring at her with an eerie smile.

“Erm.....”

“*Grin* Now then, shall we begin. This isn’t an order from the Central Headquarters, but if I don’t do this properly, then it wouldn’t feel right to have *Kakkun*’s body in exchange— *\*Cough\** I was just kidding. Please pretend you never heard that.”

“.....That makes me very curious about what did Daisuke underwent.....”

“I’ve had *Kakkun* go far away. If there are Mushi of the same type around, their wavelengths would overlap.”

“Wavelength.....?”

Arisu knotted her eyebrows. With a faint smile on her lips, Ayuyu held her hands over the basin. Her appearance with her face barely lit by the candle flame truly looked like that of a fortune-teller.

“What is going to happen now? Daisuke didn’t tell me anything.”

“You are being possessed by the Mushi of your deceased friend, right. You want to know why did she leave you the Mushi. ....Is that correct? *Glimpse*”

Ayuyu glimpsed at the Morpho butterfly fluttering above them. In response, Arisu meekly nodded.

“Yes, indeed.”

“I shall tell you then. About what your friend—what was Hanashiro Mari

thinking..... *Smirk*"

Her dark pupils shifted from the Morpho butterfly to Arisu, causing her to take a gulp. A sadistic smile appeared on her face as she questioned out of nowhere.

"But, before that..... Let me ask you, how much do you know about *Kakkun*?"

Arisu vacillated, her eyebrows knotting.

"About Daisuke?"

"Special Environmental Preservation Bureau East Central Branch member, Blaze Class Rank 1, *Kakkou*—*Kakkun* is the strongest Mushitsuki. Do you know why is he that strong?"

"Why, you ask....."

"That is because *Kakkun* knows of *pain*. I know that from what I have 'seen'. Beginning with *Fuyuhotaru*, he has defeated a large number of Mushitsuki, far more than anyone else. He himself also had plenty of brushes with death and lived to tell the tale. ....The reason *Kakkun* fights on for so long is because of his promise with *Fuyuhotaru*. And also....."

Ayuyu's expression softened for a second. Unlike the gloomy smile she had till now, a lovely smile flashed across her face.

But the next moment, the unnerving smile returned to her face.

"*Grin* I know the pain that *Kakkun* felt. I also know of the pain of other Mushitsuki. *Kakkun* and I have shared our pains, that's why we are so lovey-dovey."

"Looking from Daisuke's angle, it sure doesn't look very lovey-dovey though....."

"In addition to that, we share a common point. —*Grin* I hold the foulest ability in the whole of the SEPB. I have grasped the weakness of countless Mushitsuki and made them cooperate with the SEPB. *Kakkun* and I are the undoubtably the most despised in the SEPB. *Smirk*"

".....!"

The water in the basin started to stir right before Arisu's eyes. Following that, the water began to morph under Ayuyu's hands.

Splashing around the basin, some water floated into the air and distorted, forming into a single droplet.

Soon, a creature made of water formed in Ayuyu's hands. There were eight thin legs on a flat disk-like body, with a frontal portion that was likely its head having three compound eyes and wriggling feelers. Its distorting shape trapped the light from the candle, appearing as though it would fall apart any time.

"Having a Mushi despite not being a Mushitsuki, a Mushitsuki that could be considered an anomaly..... In fact, you are quite famous amongst the higher-ups of the Central Headquarters. Even a high-ranking member like myself is already aware of your existence. Despite that, do you know why there hasn't been any orders from above for me?"

"Eh.....?"

Arisu, whose attention was caught by the unknown creature, lifted her face.

"*Grin* One of the reason is because it is dangerous. Other Mushi absolutely hates my ability. That's why, whenever I try to interfere, the Mushi resists..... What would happen if I cannot suppress it—the answer is obvious. The Mushi will rampage."

".....!"

"*Smirk* In the past, under the orders of the Central Headquarters, I attempted to interfere with the wavelength of *Kakkun's* Mushi. The end result—including me, around ten people of the guards almost died. Since then, I have been forbidden from using my ability on strong Mushitsuki. In actuality, today's job is a secret from the Central Headquarters, and *Kakkun* also told me to stop immediately the moment I detect any risk."

Arisu was flabbergasted.

"Even so, why do you think I still accepted this request....."

"I-isn't it because it was Daisuke who requested for it?"

"Of course, that was part of the reason. *Smirk* .....But, the true reason is that I

wanted to take up this mission. When I heard about the Mushitsuki that wasn't a Mushitsuki, I had always wanted to meet with you."

".....?"

"*Grin Smirk* .....Does a Mushitsuki really believe that they can befriend a normal person?"

Arisu widened her eyes, while Ayuyu laughed extremely peculiarly.

"Being feared by the masses, and living in fear of having their dreams completely consumed by their Mushi..... there's no way that a Mushitsuki would believe in a normal person who had never experienced all that. Only a Mushitsuki can understand the feelings of another Mushitsuki..... Yet, you claim that Hanashiro Mari was really your friend? You thought that you guys were friends? *Snicker*"

"Wha-.....! Mari IS my friend! That goes without saying—"

"*Smirk* That's why, I wanted to 'play around' with you..... The moment when you realised that your expectations were betrayed, just what kind of face would you make..... Just imagining that makes my heart pound nonstop."

A look of ecstasy crossed Ayuyu's face and her body was trembling just as she mentioned.

"It would be good for you to experience some *pain* as well."

*This girl.....!*

Arisu's face twisted.

There's a large number of weirdos amongst the Special Type Mushitsuki—the words that Daisuke said must have applied to people like the girl in front of her. Ayuyu appeared to truly want to watch Arisu get hurt from the bottom of her heart.

"I hate you. Despite not being a Mushitsuki, you pretend to be one..... gaining just the power without going through any suffering. That's why, I will definitely not stop halfway no matter what. Whatever's gonna happen is not going to be my concern, okay? *Smirk* However, if you prostrate yourself and lick my feet, then I might consider letting you off. *Heart Pounding*"



“.....”

“Come on, if you don’t, then I’m going to start soon. Say it, say, ‘I am sorry for pretending to be a Mushitsuki’.”

“.....Who do you think you’re babbling on about to?”

Arisu slowly got up from her chair. Anger bubbled up from her heart.

—*See you tomorrow.*

Mari had said that with a smile. Arisu could affirm that that smile was genuine.

The one who doesn't know anything is Ayuyu.

Despite the short time, Arisu had passed her time together with Mari. The girl in front of her was the one who did not know what did Arisu and Mari felt yet declared that Arisu had been betrayed.

Arisu believed in Mari.

—*Mari is definitely not a cruel Mushitsuki who revels in hurting other people.*

“Get on with it quickly. I will not allow you to stop halfway.”

Arisu stated flatly.

The smile disappeared from Ayuyu’s face.

“.....Someone like you can just break.”

The water in the shape of a Diving beetle in her hands deformed. The candle flame in the wall-mounted lamp fluttered.

The Mushi made of liquid gradually transformed. At the same time, the movements of the Morpho butterfly become erratic.

“*Kakkun* is surely the same as Hanashiro Mari.”

Ayuyu said.

“I don't know what you think about him, but..... *Kakkun* does not think of you as a friend. The only reason that he stays by your side is because of his mission.”

Arisu bit her lips.

She already knew that. However, having that stated so flat out still made her chest hurt for some reason.

The body of the Diving beetle split into two, revealing two pairs of wings.

“.....!”

Seeing its newly transformed shape, Arisu was speechless.

It was the Morpho butterfly.

Completely similar in shape to the Morpho butterfly dancing near the ceiling, another Morpho butterfly was born.

*“Grin”*

Ayuyu looked down with a distorted smile at the Morpho butterfly glistening with silver radiance in her hands.

“My ability allows me to view the memories of the past seen by other Mushi.....”

Suddenly, the shape of the butterfly made of water collapsed.

The mass of water fell into the basin with a splash. When it became still, the surface of the water reflected the light from the lamp.

—No, it was not due to the reflection of the light from the lamp. What was reflected on the surface was something completely different.

“I wonder what kind of appearance did the Mushi saw of its host.....”

Arisu’s face stiffened.

What was displayed on the water surface was the figure of a girl with her mouth hidden behind a muffler—it was Hanashiro Mari.

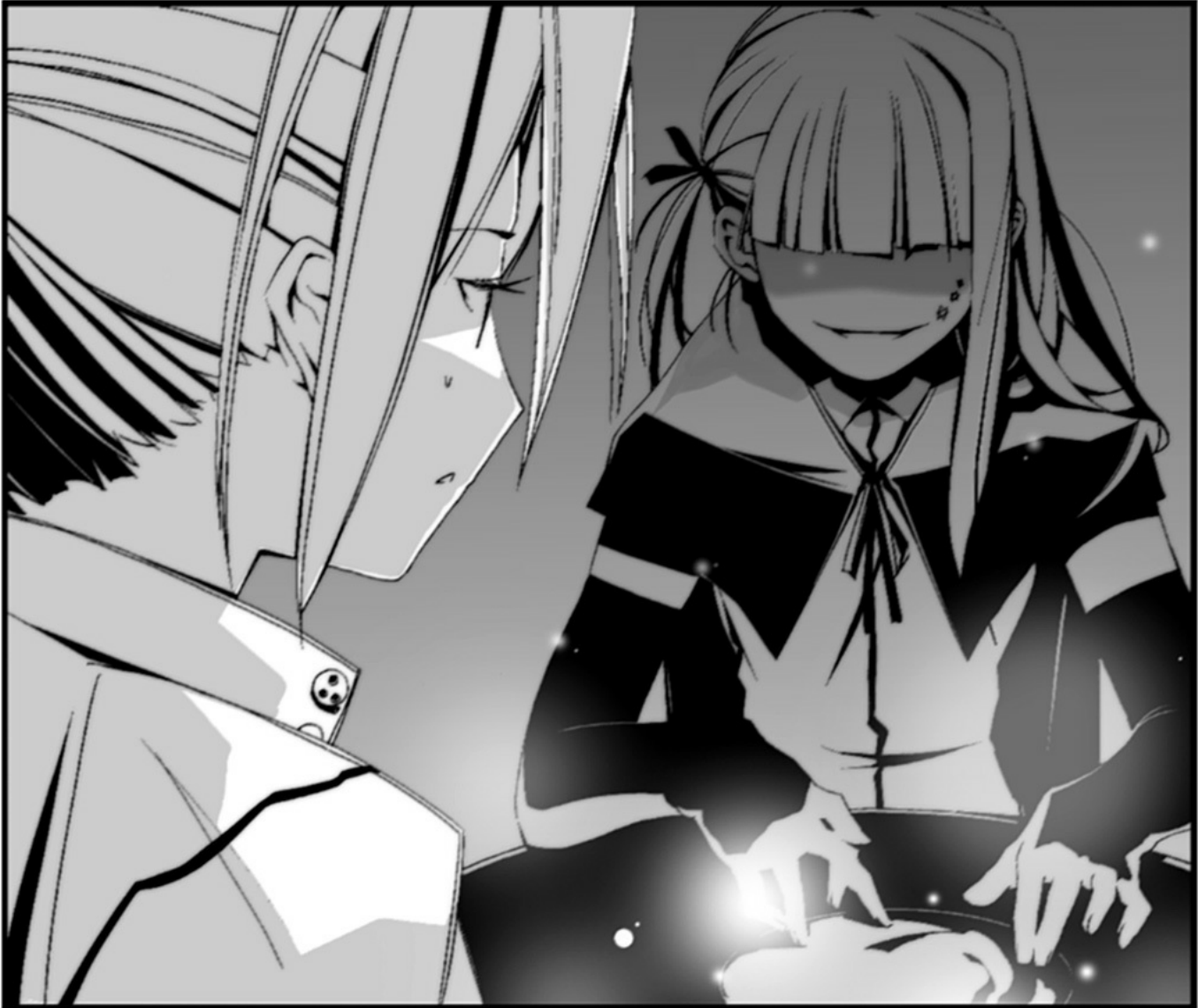
## Part 4

“T-this is.....”

Arisu choked out a quivering voice. Supporting herself on the table with both of her hands, she stared into the basin with her body leaning forwards.

*“Grin”*

With her hands above the water, a smile formed on Ayuyu’s face. Looking closely, Arisu could see tiny water droplets floating around her. The droplets trapped the light from the lamp, causing the area around Ayuyu and the table to glitter and appear as if they were in another space.



“Even the Mushi have memories. My ability allows the wavelength of my Mushi to match with that of other people’s Mushi, forming a link to their memories that I can see.....”

The Morpho butterfly flew flusteredly around the ceiling. It looked as if it was running amok in pain.

“Reading the memories of a Mushi is the same as reading the memories of their host. However, that is not the case for you. If I can read the past memories of this Mushi, it should show that of its original host—that of Hanashiro Mari.”

It was just as Ayuyu explained.

The figure displayed in the water was that of Hanashiro Mari with her mouth covered by her muffler. She was at the rooftop of a tall building somewhere. Dressed in a strange white coat, she was looking down below her. —Probably because they were in the vantage of the Mushi, they were looking down on Mari from an even higher point.

[I’ll find it tonight for sure.....]

The surface of the water stirred, and they could hear a soft voice.

The voice indubitably belonged to that of Mari.

“Mari.....!”

It was the figure of Arisu’s close friend while she was still alive one year ago. The yearning and happiness from seeing her once again caused tears to muddle her sight.

[—*ing* Mushitsuki. Even if I have to turn all the Mushitsuki in Akamaki City into Fallen—]

The display on the water surface was riddled with static, and Mari’s voice was cut off halfway.

“.....Mari.....?”

Arisu was shaken when she saw the sharp glint in Mari’s eye.

The Hanashiro Mari shown in the reflection was not the Mari that Arisu knew. The girl that she knew always stayed in the hospital room and was a docile girl

who spoke gently.

However, the Mari being displayed had a severe expression that seemed to belong to another person. It belonged to that of a *Hunter* that was stalking its prey—alternatively, it belonged to that of a warrior.

[I found you—]

Mari lifted her head and grabbed the crutch next to her. In no time, silver feelers stretched out to cover her body and imprinted onto her skin. With silver patterns on her face and a shining spear in her hands, she jumped down the building.

There was a lone Mushitsuki on the ground. He saw Mari and materialised his Mushi with a look of shock. However, Mari just bisected the Mushi with a swing of her spear.

The random Mushitsuki was turned into a Fallen and collapsed onto the floor powerlessly.

*Thump—.*

Witnessing this ghastly scene, Arisu's heart pounded strongly.

[It's not him either—]

Leaving with her exceedingly cold voice, the scene in the reflection changed.

What appeared next was a hospital room.

It was Mari's private room which Arisu was familiar with.

[.....]

Above the bed, Mari was reading a picture book.

The terribly expressionless look on her face spoke of the reality of her solitude. Arisu could feel her heart wrenching in pain.

She watched as the seasons changed. The trees outside of the windows turned barren.

However, there was not a single change in Mari's situation.

She was still only staring at the same picture book motionlessly.

It looked like she felt pain in her chest. Her face distorted all of a sudden and her body cowered.

“Ah.....”

Arisu reflexively stretched out her hand, but there was no way she could reach the past Mari. Her fingertip touched the surface of the water, forming ripples that distorted the view.

[Uu..... uu.....]

Clutching her chest, Mari was crying. Tears fell onto her laps as she bit her lips and tried to suppress her moans.

*Thump—.*

Arisu’s heart beat even harder, as if Mari’s own pain was being transmitted to her.

She stopped her outstretched hand and clenched it to a fist.

The lonely, inorganic and unchanging days continued as Mari battled her illness. She was expressionless whenever what looks to be her attending doctor spoke to her, but she would bite her lips when she was left alone. The figure of her crying wordlessly alone at night was displayed innumerable times.

“.....!”

All of a sudden, the water surface turned rough.

The water droplets around Ayuyu burst and she exerted more strength into her hands hovering above the basin.

The Morpho butterfly floating near the ceiling ceased its writhing and merely looked down at Ayuyu and Arisu intently. The silver radiance it emitted slowly grew more intense.

“*Khh.....!* Looks like I can’t suppress it any longer..... that was fast as expected. I’ve not met such a formidable target since *Kakkun.....!*”

“Ayuyu.”

Arisu stared straight at the girl who was grimacing.

“You will not stop halfway. —That’s what you declared, right.”

Under Arisu's glare, a fearless smile emerged on Ayuyu's face.

"*Snicker* .....Naturally. After all, you are not yet broken. The fun has just begun."

The choppiness of the water surface settled down.

It was tough looking at the miserable state of Mari's past figure.

However, Arisu could not avert her eyes.

She must witness Mari's true feelings with her own eyes no matter what. That was what she thought.

[.....Mari!]

From the reflection that appeared once more, the shouting voice of a man could be heard. It was a voice Arisu had not heard before.

Mari was standing by the window dressed in the white coat. The man's voice came from behind her and his figure could not be seen.

[Please stop this already, Mari.....]

[Didn't you say so. That Mushitsuki..... if it's me, then it might be possible to defeat that Undying Mushitsuki.]

*Thump—.*

The *Undying* Mushitsuki.

Arisu's heart jumped.

The scene changed again.

[Just what is with this body! What is it so broken and tattered!]

Mari bawled.

And again.

[Nice to meet you, Hanashiro Mari-san.]

With a beaming smile, a girl greeted Mari.

That was the first meeting between Ichinokuro Arisu and Hanashiro Mari.

"....."



Arisu watched the scene without moving. Under her gaze, the figure of the two girls conversing repeated days after days.

“*Smirk* Looks like you guys sure get along well. ....Up till that point only, though.”

Ayuyu looked at Arisu who raised her head.

“.....”

“Are you so sentimental that you can’t even speak. *Snicker* Well, be sure to fully enjoy the most of your playing at making friends.”

The reflection changed to another scene.

[Stop..... don’t kill my Mushi..... please.....]

A Mushitsuki pleaded before Mari.

[Ah.....?]

Mari looked at her own hands in shock.

[.....]

Arisu too, looked at her hands.

[I..... Is it okay for me to be together with Arisu as it is?]

Mari seemed to be talking to somebody.

[I..... want to live—.]

A soft utter leaked from her mouth.

*Thump—.*

*—I want to live.*

Mari’s wish could be summed up in that one sentence.

*Thump thump—.*

The throbbing in Arisu’s heart quickened bit by bit.

[Thank you, *Sensei*.]

Mari said to the person who seemed to be by her side.

Again, the scene changed to reveal Mari with a serene—almost precarious transparent smile.

[Because Arisu is kind, even for my request, she will.....]

Static appeared in the reflection once more.

The figure of Mari glaring into the room with a sharp glint in her eyes appeared.

[Right now, I..... feel like I would not lose to anyone. Even if it's against one of the *Original Three*, Aria Varej—even if it's you.]

*Bang.*

Beads of sweat appeared on the forehead of Ayuyu who looked taken aback.

“I-it can't be, is that person..... *Sanbikime*? The progenitor of the Fusion Types.....”

[You are the *Hunter*, right.]

The girl which Mari was standing guard against was someone Arisu knew as well.

Rina—the girl she had met at the Central Headquarters of the SEPB the other day. She had called out to Arisu as *Hunter* the moment she saw the Morpho butterfly.

[Target confirmed! Capture it!]

What appeared next were figures in white coats moving to attack Mari and Rina.

—*The Central Headquarters wanted to capture Mari..... Did they know about the Morpho butterfly beforehand.....?*

Her heart was already beating so heavily that it sounded irritating to her ears.

However, Arisu's consciousness was thrown into disarray the next moment.

“Has the Central Headquarters already faced off against Hanashiro Mari once? *Heart Throbbing* .....But, I've never heard anything about..... *Kh!*”

The water droplets around Ayuyu dispersed once more. Large ripples

propagated in the basin, disrupting the image.

Arisu's heart palpitations reached its peak.

The Morpho butterfly released a flash of silver light.

“—”

At the same time, Arisu felt her consciousness ‘connect’ with that of the Morpho butterfly.

“*Grin* It's useless to resist..... I can still go on.”

“—.....”

Ignoring Ayuyu whose expression hardened in contrast to her words, Arisu looked up at the Morpho butterfly in a daze.

She gently raised her right hand.

The Morpho butterfly landed on the palm of Arisu's hand.

“*Question mark?* Arisu-san, please view the image instead of that butterfly. You're wasting my efforts—”

“.....”

Arisu looked at Ayuyu and smiled with a grin.

“Arisu..... -san?”

With the Morpho butterfly in her palm, Arisu walked towards the corner of the room. She opened the cleaning supplies closet and took out a mop.

“*Sweats* Could it be that—”

Arisu swung the mop around in a spin, pointing it towards Ayuyu.

—Right after, the Morpho butterfly transformed.

Its wings morphed into feelers which entwined around the mop. Within an instant, there was a sparkling silver spear in Arisu's hands.

“*Dioresutoi's Mushitsuki*..... You are a hindrance.”

A frightfully cold voice spilled out from Arisu's lips.

The colour on Ayuyu's face drained.

“Could it be that..... you are Hanashiro Mari-san?”

With Arisu’s face—Hanashiro Mari swung the spear at Ayuyu with a smirk.

## Part 5

The silver spear cleanly bisected the basin filled with water along with the table.

The chair which Ayuyu was sitting on was also destroyed.

*“Somersault”*

With a backflip, Ayuyu dodged the spear by a hair’s breadth.

*“Hustle”*

Part of her forelocks scattered in the air. A distorted smile formed on her lips even as a streak of blood flowed down her face.

*“Snicker* This is the first time I’ve seen such a method of ‘rampage’. You must have really hated seeing your past self. *Smirk”*

Ayuyu stretched out her hand and the spilt water accumulated around her arm.

*“However..... I am also not a Secret Class Rank 4 for nothing. It would be best for you not to underestimate me.”*

She hit the wall behind her with her arm where the water was collected.

*Splash!* A water film of around one millimetre thickness spread on the wall.

[You..... do not die.....?]

Mari’s side profile was projected into the wall of the Arts room. There seemed to be someone nearby, but their face could not be seen due to the backlighting.

*“Let’s continue with the request. Grin”*

*“.....”*

The face of ‘Mari’ twisted.

The silver spear swung horizontally in a slash.

A gale of silver scales grazed against the top of Ayuyu's head as she reflexively lowered her body.

A large tremor shook the school building.

The loud reverberation of destruction only lasted for a second.

"....."

Ayuyu gaped with her mouth wide open while holding her head.

A portion of the wall and the ceiling was gone without a trace. Bright sunlight shone into the previously dark room.

[I—want the—]

The image left on what remained of the wall was flickering, about to disappear any second.

'Mari' approached Ayuyu without speaking.

"Aa..... uu....."

Ayuyu retreated with a terrified expression. A second later, the emergency alarm rang throughout the school building.

"Dioresutoi's Mushi are just hindrances....."

Right as 'Mari' was about to swing down the spear on the frozen Ayuyu.

A black shadow cut between the two of them.

The jet-black figure swatted the spear away right before it met Ayuyu.

Silver scales disintegrated the wall diagonal to Ayuyu.

".....Kakkun!"

A youth covered in a black long coat stood between the two girls. Red lights shone on the goggles that covered half of his face. A green pattern ran along the small part of his cheek that was exposed.

".....Fuu!"

'Mari' manipulated the spear adroitly, brandishing the spear in a horizontal sweep towards Daisuke.

However, the youth barely blocked the shaft of the spear with his elbow in the nick of time. He aimed a kick at 'Mari's' leg.

But, she easily evaded the kick with a jump to the back. Assuming a frontal stance, she propped the spear in Daisuke's direction.

"*Tch..... Kororo*, you disobeyed my instructions, didn't you? You were supposed to stop immediately the moment you sense danger. —Calm down, Arisu!"

"*Shiver T*-that's wrong, *Kakkun.....* The one there is—"

Behind Daisuke, Ayuyu choked up with a shivering voice.

[That's why, I..... will become Arisu.....]

In the image which seems about to fade away anytime, Hanashiro Mari said.

"That person is..... Hanashiro Mari."

".....!"

He must have been shocked, as he stiffened.

"Hanashiro Mari, you say.....?"

Daisuke and 'Mari' stared at each other through his goggles. He seemed to tighten his clenched fists.

"You say you will become Arisu.....!"

Even with the goggles covering his face, one could tell that his expression has hardened.

'Mari' grinned.

Kusuriya Daisuke.

She knew about him.

"So, you are Kusuriya Daisuke....."

Facing 'Mari' with her spear, Daisuke took out his handgun.

"I've heard from *Sensei*, so I know about you..... About how you are also a Fusion Type and a strong Mushitsuki to boot."

The two Fusion Type Mushitsuki stared into each other at close proximity.

“*Kororo.....* cut your link with the Morpho butterfly. Cancel your ability.”

In response to Daisuke’s low voice, Ayuyu retorted.

“B-but..... It seems that that person knows of something far beyond what we can imagine. She also seemed to have been in direct contact with *Sanbikime.....* And also, the Central Headquarters appears to have already met that Mushi in the past—”

“All that doesn’t matter. —Hurry up. If this continues, I have a feeling that something irreversible might happen.”

His severity must have been from the irregular atmosphere that he felt. Ayuyu raised her hands over the remaining fluid on the wall.

[I—]

However, the reflection did not disappear. Ayuyu raised a pained scream.

“It can’t be.....! I can’t separate the wavelengths..... the link is—Ah..... my Mushi is being..... sucked in—”

Her face turned even more pallid and she shook nonstop.

[I must go—]

In the projection, Hanashiro Mari muttered.

“Between you and I..... I’ve always wanted to test out which of us is stronger.”

‘Mari’ kicked off the floor towards Daisuke.

Clicking his tongue, Daisuke pointed the barrel towards ‘Mari’—.

“*Tch*, looks like I have no choice..... Sorry about this—”

The arm holding the handgun turned to the side.

“—*Kororo.*”

Before Daisuke’s gaze and the barrel of the gun, Ayuyu’s eyes widened.

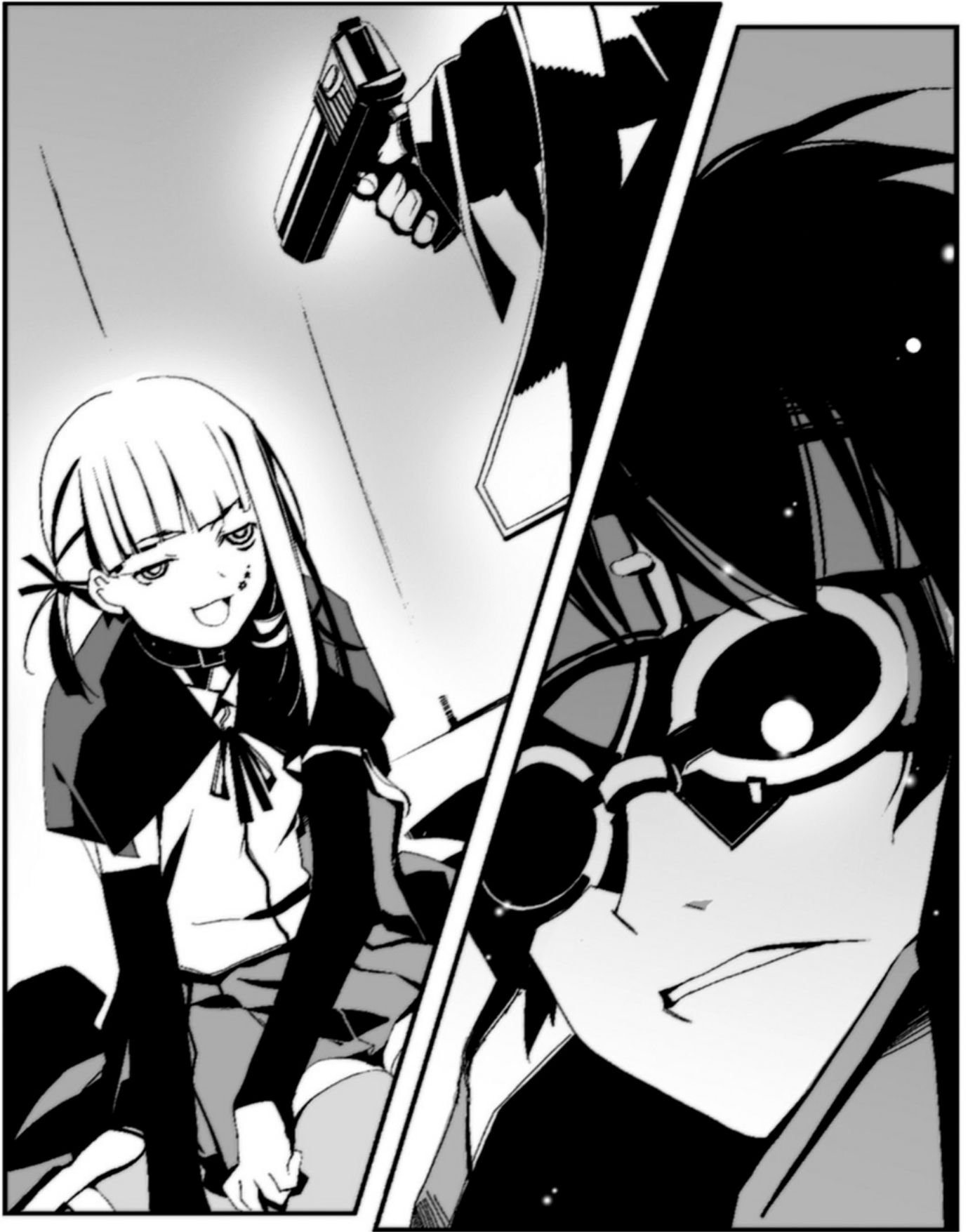
“.....*Snicker*”



Lying on the floor, Ayuyu gave a smile towards Daisuke. There was not a speck of fear—on the contrary, as if that was what she wished for Daisuke to do, she flashed a blissful smile.

“If it’s pain, I’m already used to it. ....Isn’t that right, *Kakkun*?”

“.....”



Daisuke wordlessly pulled the trigger.

The figure of Hanashiro Mari reflected on the water surface smiled peacefully.

[See you tomorrow, okay—]

The bullet skimmed past Ayuyu and smashed into the wall along with the thin film of water.

“.....!”

Ayuyu collapsed backwards without making any sound.

“My bullet should not be able to completely kill a Special Type. She should not have turned into a Fallen.....”

Daisuke’s face twisted. —As if he could feel Ayuyu’s pain for his own.

The moment the reflection on the water disappeared, a change occurred in ‘Mari’.

All expression disappeared suddenly, and she collapsed into Daisuke’s arms. The Morpho butterfly separated from the spear as though it was being ejected.

“.....Nn.....”

The girl groaned in Daisuke’s arms.

“Hmm? I.....”

“.....I guess I should at least ask. You are Ichinokuro Arisu, right?”

“Eh? Ah..... W-what do you think you are doing hugging me, get away from me!”

Arisu’s cheeks flushed and she sent Daisuke flying. Then, she noticed the miserable state of the surroundings and took a look around the Arts room.

“W-what happened? Did you do this, Daisuke?”

“.....Looks like it’s Arisu after all.”

Daisuke lowered his shoulders in ease.

“Hanashiro Mari eh..... This has become much more troublesome than I ever imagined.....”

With the emergency alarm in the background, the youth took a big sigh.

# Episode 08. The Demon Who Burns Dreams

“Do you have anything to raise in defence, *Kakkou*?”

—There was an existence known as *Mushi*.

Ten years had passed since rumours of their existence has been whispered around in Japan.

“.....”

They infest humans, feeding on the hopes and dreams of their host in order to grow; it is questionable as to whether they can even be considered as living creatures. With dubious origins and unknown behaviours, the *Mushi* were named as such due to their external appearance resembling that of insects.

With no lack of witness testimonies of *Mushi* and related incidents, the society has come to fear the *Mushi* and those afflicted by them, known as *Mushitsuki*.

However, the stance of the government had always remained the same.

That is—‘there is no such things’.

But in reality, there exist a clandestine governmental body that specialises in the capturing and concealment of all things related to the *Mushi* and *Mushitsuki*.

The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

An organisation which manages and trains detained *Mushitsuki*, as well as the capturing of unregistered *Mushitsuki*.

Commonly abbreviated as the SEPB, their activities however, never appear on the surface.

“Then, as responsibility for allowing Rina’s escape, as well as for the injuring of *Kororo*.....”

The SEPB classifies Mushitsuki based on their characteristics and level of risk.

Those excelling in combat are placed under Blaze Class. Those with special abilities that fall outside of combat are Irregular Class. In addition, Mushitsuki which hold special reasons for which their existence is to be concealed holds Secret Class. Furthermore, powerful Mushitsuki are also given a rank from Rank 10 to Rank 1 based on the effectiveness of their abilities, while the rest are unranked.

Most of the registered Mushitsuki are unranked, while Rank 1 Mushitsuki are rare.

Of the current Mushitsuki known to the SEPB, there were only two Rank 1.

Corrections. The girl previously classified as Irregular Class Rank 1 already had her Mushi killed, and has turned into a Fallen—a Mushitsuki who lost their Mushi; a living corpse without thoughts or emotions. The girl, known as *Fuyuhotaru*, merely a primary schooler at that time, was a Mushitsuki with such tremendous destructive capability that she single-handedly brought the SEPB to the brink of annihilation.

Thereupon, the number of Rank 1 counts at one presently. He was none other than the one who turned *Fuyuhotaru* into a Fallen and then captured her—.

“Blaze Class Rank 1 member of the East Central Branch, *Kakkou*. You are thereby demoted.”

*Kakkou*—Kusuriya Daisuke, dressed from top to toe in a black suit, gnashed his molars. He clenched his fist tightly at the irritation that bubbled up from his chest.

He was currently in the Central Headquarters of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

More specifically, he was located in a bright white meeting room on the sixth floor of the vast underground facility hidden under Akamaki City.

There was a round table and chairs in the wide room, but that was all. The upper portion of the wall was made up of a different-coloured material. Those were probably magic mirrors with multiple bureau members on the opposite side looking down on him.

“As Blaze Class Rank 2, you shall continue with your mission of the monitoring of Ichinokuro Arisu.”

There were only two people in the room.

Facing directly opposite Daisuke with the round table between them as a woman with a tall stature.

She was a beauty dressed in a suit, with a bewitching beauty spot below her thin eyes. This person who serves as the commissioner for the Central Headquarters that he was meeting for the first time was apparently called Miguruma Yaeko.

“.....Spit out the information.”

Daisuke spoke for the first time since entering the room.

He did not care at all about their positions. She would probably lodge a complaint with his actual superior, the Branch Director of the East Central Branch later, but he was much more infuriated at something else that he did not care.

“Information, you say?”

“The information regarding Hanashiro Mari. That ladybird girl..... when Rina saw Arisu’s Morpho butterfly, she called her as *Hunter*. I also know from *Kororo*’s ability that Hanashiro Mari was known as *Hunter* while she was alive, and had fought the Central Headquarters before.”

Facing Daisuke who spoke with a barely suppressed tone, Miguruma Yaeko only looked back at him calmly.

“Just who the hell is Hanashiro Mari! When did this case even started? Why is this mission given to me who isn’t even from the Central Headquarters!”

Daisuke’s patience had reached its limits and he hollered.

However, Yaeko’s calm countenance did not crumble. She answered in a reproving tone unperturbedly.

“Regardless of the reason or situation, the failure of your mission is unacceptable. That is what it means to be Rank 1. You have betrayed our expectations.”

Daisuke's face distorted more and more.

“From today onwards, all reports regarding Hanashiro Mari shall be submitted to me. I may have left the Central Headquarters for an official dispatch for a year, but I have completely grasped the current situation.”

“Don't mess with me.....! Even if you tell me to continue with this mission, without knowing anything—”

“That is all regarding the reappointment of Blaze Class Rank 2 member, *Kakkou*. I pray for the success of your mission, *Kakkou*.”

Daisuke reflexively raised his fist. However, Yaeko only raised her chin with a smile as if looking down on him. She had a gentle look on her face, but the penetrating look in her thin eyes immobilised Daisuke.

“Damn it!”

After she left, Daisuke's groan echoed in the bright white room.



## Part 1

When he opened his eyes, Daisuke was standing alone in a cheap apartment.

“.....?”

He could not remember why he was here. With his head tilted in wonder, he approached the window to look outside.

Somewhere faraway, he could see two familiar backs facing his way.

It was his mother and elder sister.

His sister turned around, meeting the eyes of Daisuke in the apartment. — However, she averted her eyes expressionlessly. It was as if she did not recognise Daisuke.

A sharp pain stabbed through his heart.

He recalled.

This was the scene of himself when his mother and sister had left him.

*I want a place to belong.* — Having just found such a dream, it was the scene of Kusuriya Daisuke as a child.

“.....!”

A sense of dizziness that resembled free-falling assaulted him.

His view was completely dyed in white.

The luminance that appeared as a flash gathered into particles, changing into pure white snow that fell from the skies.

“My dream is to find a place that would allow me to stay.....”

In the snowing scene, a petite girl looked up at Daisuke. A white cloud would form whenever she breathed out and her face was flushed. In her hands held a white glistening mass—it was a firefly.

“Your dream is very similar to mine.”

The words leaked from Daisuke’s mouth unconsciously. He raised his handgun, directing the barrel straight at the girl. His face till his body was all covered up by a pair of black goggles and a black long coat.

“Then, I will give my dream to you!”

The girl held out the white firefly in her hands towards Daisuke.

“So, please don’t ever give up on your dream!”

He recalled.

The girl was called *Fuyuhotaru*.

A Mushitsuki girl who held the same dream as Daisuke.

“I understand. I promise you, I will never give up. So one day, you must recall your dream as well.”

He shot the Mushi of the girl who nodded with a smile. The gunshot scattered the snow dancing down the skies.

Any Mushitsuki that was turned into a Fallen will never regain their former thoughts and emotions again. That was the reality that had persisted till now.

Another sharp pain stabbed his heart.

*Fuyuhotaru*.

Daisuke made a promise with her, who held the same dream, to never give up.

His battle all began from that one promise.

However, no matter how long he fought, the battle between fellow Mushitsuki never came to an end.

—A gunshot rang out again.

“Please, just stop!”

A girl in restraints shouted. Behind her, the faces of the Mushitsuki were painted in fear.

“We’re going to continue, until the very last person. —Or, until you pledge to

cooperate with the SEPB, Rina.”

Daisuke tormented the Mushitsuki young man with a smile.

—When was it that he started thinking so.

Even if *Fuyuhotaru* was to come back, the only thing that would happen would be a repeat of the past. The two of them would only end up in combat.

That’s why, he would end the fight between Mushitsuki.

He would become stronger than anyone else, causing all Mushitsuki to fear him such that no fighting would occur.

Until the day comes when *Fuyuhotaru* can return without fighting. When no one has to be hurt.

However—.

An acute pain ran through his heart.

He was exhausted.

He was sick of pain. Be it his own or others.

His vision turning dark, Daisuke slowly sank into the darkness.

His body felt as heavy as lead.

Like falling into the bottom of the deep ocean, Daisuke descended gradually without resisting.

The plunging sensation felt very relaxing.

The sweet enticement of forgetting everything softly embraced him.

In contrast to the pleasant allurement, the pain in his chest amplified.

No, rather than pain, this felt like—.

More than his chest, even his neck and his back—.

“.....*Guaah! Guuaaaah!*”

Daisuke was awakened by the sound of his own screams.

“How many times do you need me to call you before waking up, stupid

Daisuke!”

He heard Arisu’s voice from below.

Unable to comprehend the situation, he desperately turned his neck to find Arisu dressed in a hakama. Her arms held onto his neck and legs, raising his body up in the air.

“Wai-..... Arisu.....!”

“Here you go. A pleasant awakening for the sleepyhead! Accept this love bestowed upon you by your master, *hohohoho!*”

With a rumbustious laughter, Arisu spun Daisuke round and round. Intense pain shot through his neck and spine.

“*Oooaaaah!*”

“This is your punishment for sleeping so peacefully with a look of happiness while your master was sweating it out since early morning! Is this painful? Does it hurt? Where’s the ‘I’m sorry’? .....Oops, looks like he stopped moving.”

“.....”

From since he entered the SEPB, Daisuke had successfully completed a range of missions.

There were also many which have brought him near the brink of death.

He had completely no idea what kind of occurrence the mission this time round would bring him to. He had no idea, but..... only this, he was sure.

Someday, he would settle his score with this girl, Ichinokuro Arisu without fail —.

“For some reason, Daisuke-san’s mood seems to be very poor somehow.”

—They had arrived at school and Daisuke immediately went to his seat and propped his head on the table.

The voice came from diagonally in front of him. He turned over there with a glimpse. It was his classmate who was relatively tall amongst the girls, Kujou Takako. She was the prime example of a sheltered proper lady, one truly befitting the Horusu Seijou Academy where more than half the students were

scions of prestigious families.

“It probably goes without saying that Arisu did something to Kusuriya-kun again.”

The girl with thin eyes like cats was Saionji Ena. Her short haircut perfectly fitted her lively and active personality. She had a sense of refinement completely opposite to that which Takako held.

“If you’re speaking about him, then he hasn’t met my face at all since breakfast. I merely subjected him to *The Arisu Backbreaking Special*~ for a bit this morning, that’s all.”

Between Takako and Ena, the seated Arisu only turned around with a bored look. She looked as if all the faults in the world belonged to Daisuke.

“Are you sure what you are learning is martial arts and not pro-wrestling.....?”

“Totally.....”

Daisuke murmured so softly as to not be heard by anyone.

In the first place, Daisuke’s area of jurisdiction was not here in Akamaki City, but in Ouka City where he works under the East Central Branch of the SEPB there. However, under orders from the Central Headquarters, he was attached to Horusu Seijou Academy as an exceptional case in order to take care of a Mushitsuki incident here. From then, he progressively began to get involved in a case regarding a certain girl.

“If I was serious, that would’ve been followed by a headlock, and then I’ll finish off the combo with an Argentine Backbreaker. But then, he was knocked out in no time. Those with no grit truly have no grit.”

*Just spare me already—.*

Averting his face, Daisuke heaved a sigh internally. He was deeply thankful to have lost consciousness at an early stage.

Ichinokuro Arisu.

Despite being more petite than either Takako or Ena, her attitude and presence were larger than life. She had long hair that was tied behind her head. A strong will and vibrant emotions dwelled in her large black eyes. She was also

the precious daughter of the Ichinokuro house, a renowned family around the area with a long history and extensive connections. From the investigations that Daisuke had requested, it seemed that he ought to be more wary of the Ichinokuro house rather than Arisu who had yet to begin the upbringing for taking over as the next head.

Arisu was not a Mushitsuki. However, the silver Morpho butterfly frequented around her, and she could also make use of its powers thus being an exceptional case. It was Daisuke's mission to monitor over Arisu as well as the Morpho butterfly.

In the time he spent monitoring Arisu, the existence of another girl also came into play.

It was Arisu's close friend in the past, Hanashiro Mari.

Mari had passed on from this world one year ago. However, she was in fact a Mushitsuki, and was the original owner of the Morpho butterfly. The case being where the Mushi remains even after the loss of their owner was the first to be heard of in all of SEPB's record.

It would not be strange at all for the strongest Mushitsuki at this point, *Kakkou*, to take charge of such a case with so many precedents.

But, what made *Kakkou*—Daisuke so sceptical was the fact that the matter for which he was called to Akamaki City was completely unrelated to Ichinokuro Arisu. The incident caused by the Mushitsuki called Harimoto Jun started here in Horusu Seijou Academy, where 'it so happened' that the Morpho butterfly which bound Ichinokuro Arisu and Hanashiro Mari was also at.

—*There's no way this is a coincidence.*

Daisuke glared severely at Arisu who was talking to Ena and Takako.

"You see. Kusuriya-kun is glaring at you. He's angry after all."

Both Daisuke and Hanashiro Mari's Mushi belonged to the Fusion Type, an extremely rare occurrence.

In addition, the power of the Morpho butterfly was fairly formidable. It could not fuse with Arisu's body as she was not a Mushitsuki, but the spear from

which it was formed with had considerable firepower. He could not begin to imagine how powerful it would have been when it was fused with its original owner, Hanashiro Mari. That was to say nothing of the fact that Hanashiro Mari had clashed with the Central Headquarters once in the past.

“Shouldn’t you apologise? I seldom see Daisuke-san get so angry.....”

No matter how he thought about it, his current mission regarding Hanashiro Mari and Ichinokuro Arisu felt awry.

He had undertaken numerous difficult missions.

However, this was the first time he had such a challenging mission.

He wanted to be done with this mission quickly and return to his former area of jurisdiction in Ouka City. These streets felt too constrained to him, and he hated to be in the Central Headquarters’ territory. Above all else, he could not even visit the girl whom he cared like a sister while he is tied down over here—.

“Hmm, I guess so. Indeed, we can’t be said to be having a working relationship staying like that.”

Arisu nodded unpretentiously and stood up from her seat. She approached Daisuke and sat down on the empty seat in front of him exaggeratedly.

Facing each other directly, Daisuke could see his own figure reflected in Arisu’s eyes. —For Daisuke who was feared as the Reaper in the SEPB, how long has it been since somebody looked him straight in the eyes like that. Unknowingly, he looked straight back at the girl.

“Jeez, what I should I even do with you. Since it can’t be helped, I’ll let you apologise. Come now, apologise all you want, from the bottom of your heart.”

“Fine fine, I’m really sorry. It was my bad..... not, why do I have to do this! It should be the reverse, the reverse! You should apologise to me!”

Unthinkingly getting up from his seat and shouting, the class’ attention was focused onto Daisuke.

“Kh.....”

Realising his position, he moaned. For his cover as a student during this monitoring mission, he portrayed himself as a friendly and easy-to-approach

person.

“Having learnt yet another retort, you sure have progressed, Daisuke.....”

Being surrounded by somewhat pitying looks, Daisuke promptly took a seat. With a stiff smile still on his face, he grabbed Arisu’s head with his right hand.

“*Ahaha*, Ichinokuro-san sure is an interesting personage. I wonder just what is in this head of yours?”

“*Fufufu*, please don’t mess around too much. It feels like my head is going to burst.”

“Burst for all I care, the sooner the better.”

Ena and Takako rushed over to where the two were engaged in a glaring contest.

“Ku-su-ri-ya-kun!”

“*Uwaah!*”

Being hugged from behind by Ena, Daisuke became flustered. Not minding the gaze of their classmates, her face approached his cheek.

“S-Saionji-san.....!”

“Now now, don’t make such a sullen look, okay? Looking on our behalves.”

“That’s right, Daisuke-san. I prefer Daisuke-san when he doesn’t look angry.”

Takako too took his hand into hers.

“*Uu.....*”

With that, he could only keep quiet with his cheeks flushed. The face of Arisu grinning with a look of victory annoyed him to no end.

With an incomprehensible sense of defeat and self-derision, the chime signalling the start of short homeroom resounded in his ears.

Still smiling, Ena and Takako returned to their seats.

—*Really, this is truly challenging.*

He already knew the reason for that.



Saionji Ena and Kujou Takako.

Putting aside Ena, Takako already knew of Daisuke's true identity.

For this mission, Daisuke got along with the people from his grade, but always kept a set distance between them.

However, these girls nonchalantly skipped over that distance and tried to befriend him. To Daisuke, that was terribly—troublesome.

Daisuke would probably betray them in a heartbeat if it was for the sake of the mission. Unknown to that fact..... they tried to get close to him without even considering that. More than anything else, this would enfeeble his fighting spirit and vigilance, his resolution to fight.

There's also the girl which was the cause of his most recent nuisance.

".....What is it. Faster get back to your seat, idiot Arisu."

He spoke in a voice inaudible to the surroundings.

Ichinokuro Arisu.

The petite girl stared at Daisuke's face intently.

"Hey, Daisuke. ....Are you alright?"

"About what?"

"Lately, you've been getting up later and later. Your complexion also looks bad, and you don't eat much too..... You won't grow taller like that, you know."

She asked with a serious expression.

Daisuke felt his irritation rising.

The number one factor that Daisuke could not stomach for the mission this time round.

That was how the target for monitoring, Ichinokuro Arisu, was the type of person he hated the most.

She was the type of person with no hesitation and does things as if they were natural. Even if that was directed towards the one in charge of monitoring them.

The kind of person who would extend a helping hand without second thoughts.

“It’s fine like this. If I get taller, that’d just make me more conspicuous. Being in the surveillance team, it is the bare minimum to remain ‘normal’.”

He averted his eyes and spoke dryly. —It was definitely not because he can’t meet her eyes. That was what he told himself.

“D-do you have to go so far.....?”

“In any case, that’s none of your business. Well, even so—”

He raised a self-deprecating smile.

“Don’t worry. Even if I die, I wouldn’t leave behind my Mushi for anyone else. I wouldn’t want to cause trouble for anyone else.”

That was his true feelings.

There was no continuation to Daisuke’s dream.

Unlike Hanashiro Mari, there was no one who would mourn his death. He also did not want anyone to. Only the face of one person, the sister of the Branch Director of the East Central Branch which he belonged to came up.

With a *Pak*, the dull sound of a slap resounded in the classroom.

“.....”

It was just as the form teacher entered the classroom.

The atmosphere in the classroom froze over.

Still in the position where she slapped Daisuke’s cheeks, large beads of tears formed in Arisu’s eyes. Ena stared with her eyes widened and Takako covered her mouth with her hands. Their classmates gaped in mute bewilderment.

All of that was reflected in Daisuke’s view which was slightly angled to the side.

The one who broke the stillness was Arisu herself.

She turned around and sat down violently at her own seat with a furious look. The teacher looked like he wanted to say something, but both Arisu and

Daisuke were unspeaking.



The teacher silenced the stir and began the short homeroom in an awkward atmosphere.

Daisuke cradled his cheeks with his hands and let the informative matters that the teacher spoke flow past his ears.

“Where’s the ‘*Arisu Smack~!*’ or whatever.....”

He muttered in a soft voice nobody could hear.

His cheek only felt slightly numb and did not hurt. It felt slightly warm, but the swelling was gone after a few minutes. There was not a single difference before he was slapped and after.

But, his view of Hanashiro Mari has changed in the slightest.

*It seems that there is actually someone who would get angry if someone made fun of her—.*

If miraculously, there was even a vestige of laughable emotion or sentimentality remaining in someone like Daisuke.

Perhaps, that might be jealousy.

## Part 2

*—There's something that I'm going to investigate by myself, so you just stay at home and behave yourself.*

When Daisuke said that to Arisu after school ended, she only ignored him with a look of displeasure. It was rare to see her behave this way seeing as how she always spoke whatever was on her mind. Even Ena and Takako were perplexed.

Considering how Arisu was fundamentally simple-minded, her mood should improve by tomorrow. Even if it did not, for them whose relationship were that of the one monitoring and the one being monitored, there was not much of a hassle. As he could not allow his target to move alone, Daisuke had already arranged for a substitute.

“Geez..... What an unnecessarily troublesome mission.”

Daisuke's destination was a private room in the general hospital.

He had been here multiple times, but there was totally no change to the room as expected.

The stale air was a testament to the lack of people who visited in a long time. The large bed was left as it was, not a single crease on the blanket. In addition to that, there was also a television, an internal line and a bookshelf filled with books. If not for the nurse call line or water pitcher, the room would have given one the impression of a hotel room.

“Just let me finish up with these matters quickly, Hanashiro Mari.”

This was the room which Hanashiro Mari was admitted in.

Probably for the sake of ventilation, the windows were opened which caused the curtains to flutter. The orange sun rays casted long shadows in the room.

He had already arranged with the hospital side. There should not be anybody

entering the room for an hour.

Daisuke, still in his uniform, chucked his coat at the coat hanger. He sat down on the chair next to the bed and sighed.

“.....”

He had thought that if it was Arisu who had visited this room while Mari was still alive, she would be able to recall something which could act as a clue. However, she was only caught up in sentimentality, and did not notice anything at all.

Thus, thinking of doing a reinvestigation with an objective viewpoint, Daisuke came here once more alone, but—he instantly felt like giving up. To someone who doesn't know a thing about Hanashiro Mari like himself, the place only appeared to him as an empty room.

“Just who were you?”

Narrowing his eyes, he gazed at the empty bed.

Hanashiro Mari—.

The lone daughter of the Hanashiro house, the head family of practitioners of the Hanashiro-style flower arrangement which had many followers. Having a weak constitution since birth, it was the outbreak of a severe case of childhood illness when she was about to enter Horusu Seijou Academy Middle School that caused her to reach terminal condition. In the end, she had passed away without even attending middle school for a single day. Her cause of death was complications due to heart failure. Without anybody watching over her, she breathed her last right in this room. Her only close friend was Ichinokuro Arisu.

That was the profile of the illness-ridden middle schooler, Hanashiro Mari, on the surface.

That was all.

For Mari whose entire life could be summed up just like that, what did she feel like passing her days?

“.....*Kuku.*”

As he thought about that, laughter welled up in Daisuke.

The person known as Kusuriya Daisuke had not lived such a proper life that he is able to empathise with others. The moment he entered the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, he had already given up on leading an ordinary life.

He had been abandoned by his parent, picked up by a person called Haji Keijo and lived up till now. There was nobody he could call a close friend.

If one spoke of him as a Mushitsuki, there'd probably be more to add on about. The Blaze Class Rank 1 Mushitsuki, *Kakkou*. Also known as the ruthless Reaper without blood nor tears, abhorred even by fellow bureau members.

“.....”

Realising that he was getting emotional, he lightly shook his head. If that happened, he would be no different from Arisu.

Indeed, looking from the perspective of being a Mushitsuki, many more facets of Hanashiro Mari's life would be revealed.

Hanashiro Mari too was a Mushitsuki. Furthermore, she was a rare Fusion Type Mushitsuki, which only had a few documented cases. Fusion Type Mushitsuki originates from *Sanbikime*, one of the *Original Three*, the existences which births Mushitsuki.

Unlike the other two, *Oogui* and *Shinpu*, which at least have their appearance and slight characteristics established, *Sanbikime* could only be described as an enigma. Nothing was known about it, nothing about its appearance, behaviour, nor how does it birth Mushitsuki. Including Daisuke, other Fusion Type Mushitsuki also knew next to nothing about who or what turned them into Mushitsuki.

But, was that the case for Hanashiro Mari?

The other day, they succeeded in catching a glimpse of Hanashiro Mari while she was alive using the ability of Kurisaka Ayuyu, a member belonging to the Central Headquarters.

Arisu's memories became a mess in the middle of the process, but they managed to get Ayuyu's account. From her words, she has confirmed the possibility that Hanashiro Mari was in contact with *Sanbikime* itself.



Additionally, she was known as the *Hunter*, exterminating random Mushitsuki on the streets, in the end coming to clash with the Central Headquarters. They also learnt of the existence of the *Undying* Mushitsuki which she was chasing after—.

Why was Mari searching for the *Undying* Mushitsuki as the *Hunter*?

What is the *Undying* Mushitsuki?

Did Mari come into contact with *Sanbikime*? If so, then what information did she got from it?

Why did Mari's Mushi—the silver Morpho butterfly remain even after its host's death? Furthermore, why does it follow Ichinokuro Arisu?

What is the objective of Mari, and by extension, the Morpho butterfly?

What was Mari's connection to the Central Headquarters?

Was it really a coincidence that Daisuke got involved with the investigation of Mari and Arisu?

“.....Damn it.”

Daisuke murmured in frustration.

“It's as if getting me to come here so far was part of Hanashiro Mari and the Central Headquarters' scheme.”

He raised his head and shook off those ridiculous delusions.

During the incident the other day. Seeing the vestiges of Mari which hijacked Arisu's consciousness due to the side effects of Ayuyu's ability, he thought.

—*It was as if I came face-to-face with myself.*

The cold glare in her eyes that spoke of her will to accomplish her goals at any costs. The cynical smile on her face that doesn't trust anybody but herself.

He always thought that he had been self-conscious of that fact all along, but seeing the same expression directly definitely made an impact on him.

—*Perhaps Hanashiro Mari and I really resemble each other.*

Leading a lonesome life.

Being Fusion Type Mushitsuki.

He may have felt especially irritated due to their similarities.

“Isn't she your one and only friend.....? In that case, don't get her involved in your whims, Hanashiro Mari.”

Right when Daisuke spitted out those words with his face twisting.

“Ah, so this must be Hanashiro Mari's room.”

A voice could be heard from his back.

Still seated on the chair, Daisuke's eyes widened. He was so shocked that goosebumps rised all over his body and his breath stopped.

The voice literally came from right behind him. Daisuke was seated near the centre of the room, some distance from the entrance when he heard the voice.

“.....”

Daisuke slowly turned his neck, aware that it was already too late for him to be on guard.

There he stood, brazenly.

The way he just stood there could only be described as grandly. He looked straight ahead, unheeding of Daisuke whose head was around his waist-level, with an arrogant smile—as if facing downwards was an impossible act of his life.

He was so preposterously eye-catching that Daisuke doubted his own consciousness for not having noticed his presence.

His dishevelled hair was so disorderly that it resembled a raging flame, and a tattoo of fire ran from his right cheek till the nape of his neck.



*What the hell is this guy—.*

The pressure released by the youth was so strong that Daisuke could only look upwards without moving his body. His otherworldly presence, one that seems completely unsuited to such an ordinary hospital, was so overwhelming that Daisuke's thought processes halted.

The tattooed youth looked one round around the room, not taking Daisuke into his views—.

*“.....Haah.”*

And sighed so deeply that one could feel the exhaustion coming from the bottom of his heart. At that, the pressure emanating from his body dispersed in an instant.

“Ah-ah, I give up, woman. I can't believe it. How far are you going to make me chase you from Aoharima Island. Just spare me already, you're going to make me cry at this rate. Or rather, stubborn women like yourself are just going to end up badly. My condolences if you end up staying alone your entire life. But, personally, I feel that that isn't so bad, and I wouldn't abandon you either. Won't you come and bully me again.”

He loitered around the room, speaking out loud to nobody as he pleases.

First, he walked past Daisuke and pulled over the blanket (in addition, he also sniffed it like a dog). Following that, he dumped the blanket on the bed and approached the painting on the wall and adjusted it. He then evaluated the painting, all the while talking to himself, ‘Hmm hmm, this must be fake. Nothing remarkable at all. Hm? Expert appraisal? So, it was real after all. That's impressive!’, appearing truly amazed. He then opened the fridge and took out a bottle of mineral water without permission, gulping it down in one breath (and then throwing the empty bottle out of the window with all his strength).

*“.....”*

*Is he just a pervert.....?*

Ignorant to the fact that Daisuke's appraisal of him fell drastically from being an unknown character to a pervert, the tattooed youth finally approached the bookshelf.

“*Heh*, there’s Dostoevsky, Taki, Dante, Doyle and even Descartes. What’s with this, there’s no uniformity to these books at all. Could this Hanashiro Mari have multiple personalities? Anyway, she’s definitely ill somewhere. Ah, is that why she’s in a hospital? Oops, that might be the case after all. At least there’s still some hope for her, I guess.”

When he picked up a thin picture book, his expression changed abruptly. The title of the book was, ‘Potion of Magic’.

He flipped through the book roughly before putting it back right after, appearing to have lost interest. Although it was just a normal act of returning a book to the shelf, from his previous actions, Daisuke thought that it must have been quite a miracle.

“Ah, but I’ve finally reached here after so long. After all these days and months, I must’ve travelled like over 10,000 km to search for my beloved. Aah, I’m bushed. I hereby announce with all my remaining energy: I shall catch a short rest since I’m tired.”

Rotating his shoulders with the sound of his bone creaking, the youth jumped onto the bed. Without even removing his shoe, he landed on the bed cross-legged, and placed a cigarette to his mouth which he took out from nowhere.

The consequence of which led him to come face to face with Daisuke sitting on the visitor’s chair.

“.....”

The youth froze. Seeing Daisuke straight before him, he tilted his head looking genuinely surprised.

“Who the hell are you?”

.....*This bastard.*

Daisuke’s anger skipped through all levels and shot through the roof.

So, it wasn’t because he heard Daisuke’s soliloquy that he knew this room belonged to Hanashiro Mari. Being as Daisuke did not know what this youth’s true identity was, he decided to stop acting out his ‘harmless and friendly neighbourhood Kusuriya Daisuke’ persona. He wasn’t such an idiot that needs

to be mindful about a mere pervert.

“Ah!”

The youth hit his palm with his other hand as if he thought of something. Then, he pointed at Daisuke with a look of satisfaction.

“Hanashiro Mari!”

“.....Nice to meet you, I am Hanashiro Mari.”

“Oi, that’s incredible..... You look like a guy.”

“That’s because I am one.”

“Seriously? *Grr*, so that scumbag lied to me. And he even said it was a girl.”

*‘That scumbag’.....?*

Daisuke stared at the youth watchfully.

This pervert in front of him apparently knows about Hanashiro Mari beforehand. As far as Daisuke knew, there was no information about any relations between Hanashiro Mari and a tattooed youth.

Without him noticing, Daisuke tensed his body.

*I won’t let you escape—.*

As long as there might be some kind of clue, there was no way Daisuke would allow it to escape, be it a pervert or whatever. The moment he displays any suspicious behaviour, or attempts to leave the room, Daisuke would forcefully detain him.

“Hanashiro Mari is a girl.”

“Huh? So you’re saying..... the one who lied is you? I see, that explains everything. Hey, you bastard, don't tell lies! Who the hell are you.”

“Before that, smoking is prohibited. No smoking on hospital premises.”

“*Ugh*, is that so. That’s just too bad then.”

With a grimace, he crushed the cigarette in his hand. Despite being an underaged smoker, he seemed to still follow the local rules.

“What about you, who are you.”

“Me? I’m Sehateno Harukiyo.”

Grinning, the youth gave his name with zero hesitation. His smile was a provoking one, one that revealed his canines. A strange noise rang out with a *Juu*. By some sleight of hand, the cigarette in his hands disappeared. Following that, a burnt smell irritated Daisuke’s nose.

A ridiculous name. That was probably a fake name. However, the fact that he could enter the room without Daisuke feeling his presence meant that he was no ordinary pedestrian. Daisuke kept up his guard.

“So? What about you?”

“Whatever my name is don’t matter.”

“Oh, that’s what you’re going to do after hearing other people’s name. What an outrageous fellow.”

“What are you to Hanashiro Mari? What do you know regarding her?”

Daisuke questioned in a prickly tone.

The youth called Harukiyo smiled again with a grin. After a pause, he spoke again in more ambiguity.

“I know of an out-of-this-world secret. Want me to tell you?”

“.....”

Approaching the side of the silent Daisuke, he placed his arm around his shoulder in an overly familiar manner.

“You know, about Hanashiro Mari. I heard she’s quite the beauty.”

“.....I already knew that.”

Daisuke furrowed his eyebrows. From the figure of Hanashiro Mari he saw the other day due to Ayuyu’s ability, he could see that she did indeed have beautiful facial features.

The laughter of the snorting Harukiyo seemed to be without a care in the world. It was the first time Daisuke met someone whose laughter changed in quality so rapidly. The way his smile changed from that of a wild beast to that of a friendly senior so suddenly really irritated Daisuke.

“Ah, this is so exciting. I can’t wait for her to be back. Is she having an examination now? Hey you, are you her boyfriend or something?”

Harukiyo once again sat down cross-legged on the bed, swaying back and forth in excitement as if he was a child awaiting his Christmas present.

“.....”

Daisuke raised his eyebrows. Harukiyo’s current behaviour did not seem like an act to him.

“Do you not know? Speaking of which, you look like you didn’t know much about Hanashiro Mari from the start..... In fact, it sounded like you came here after someone told you about her.”

“Hmm?”

“Hanashiro Mari is dead.”

Sehateno Harukiyo gaped his eyes wide open. The youth, who wandered around the room restlessly nonstop ever since he entered the room, froze for the first time shaken. However, that immediately changed into an intimidating smile as he glared at Daisuke.

“.....What the hell is with you. Crack another absurd joke like that and I’ll kill you.”

Daisuke continued coolly.

“It happened around one year ago. Her cause of death was complications due to heart failure.”

“.....”

“Hanashiro Mari no longer exists in this world.”

It was as if Daisuke pronounced his death sentence, as Harukiyo’s shoulders trembled in bottomless despair.

“.....-n’t fuck with me.....”

He got up from the bed with his back straightened and both of his fists clenched. His beast-like bloodshot eyes no longer reflected the figure of Daisuke.



“Don’t fuck with me!”

It was such a thunderous shout that it did not seemed as if it was a volume which humans could achieve.

“That swindling scumbag! You didn’t mention that she was dead! Not to mention more than one year ago? .....Isn’t that much earlier than when I met you, asshole! I was deceived? This very meee! You dare trick meee!”

The shout permeated every single part of Daisuke’s body and even caused the whole room to vibrate. —No, it may be that even the whole hospital shook. That was how deafening the howl was.

Harukiyo’s sudden outrage caused Daisuke to be stunned.

*What the hell is with this guy.....!*

In the remnants of the tempest-like shout of anger, Harukiyo glared out of the window with rough breathing. It was as though his mortal enemy was right out there.

Daisuke slowly stood up.

“Just who the hell are you? From where and whom did you hear about Hanashiro Mari.”

“.....”

Harukiyo, who was standing on top of the bed, took a glancing look at Daisuke below him. The gaze in his eyes was unnatural—it was that of a demon which has thrown away the mask of a human.

“I won’t accept this.....”

Muttering to himself, Harukiyo moved.

“This can’t be, that shitty bastard..... How am I going get even.....”

Cursing in soft mumbles, he descended from the bed. Ignoring Daisuke, he headed to exit the room.

But, Daisuke moved swiftly and overtook him, obstructing the entrance.

“Get out of the way. I’ll kill you.”

The blazing glare of the demon pierced through Daisuke. There was no longer the fearless grin nor carnivorous smile on his face. Plain killing intent shot through Daisuke.

“Answer my question.”

Daisuke glared back at him straight on.

He did not know anything about this youth, however, most likely—from the instincts honed due to all the near-death experiences he had, he sensed that this guy was strong. What’s more, it was at an unmatched level. If he wanted to even just stop the youth in his footsteps, it would probably require him to exert his all.

A green Cleridae flew down to Daisuke.

“.....*Haah*. The SEPB, eh.”

Looking at the Cleridae on his shoulder, Harukiyo snorted boredly.

“I see, the SEPB. It was the SEPB after all. Always the SEPB. ....That’s right, I can get even at that place.”

“.....”

Daisuke adopted a forward-leaning position, so as to be able to spring off any moment. Just the fact that he knew about the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau was enough reason to apprehend him.

However, Harukiyo grinned.

“But, my bad. —I don’t care at all, about someone like you.”

“Wha-.....”

“Downwards-facing people like you don’t enter my view at all. Those of you who go through life half-heartedly.”

Daisuke was gobsmacked. An unexplainable anger rose up in him.

“What did you say.....!”

Just when he was about to raise his hand towards Harukiyo, he heard a scream coming down the corridor behind him.

Daisuke's outstretched arm stopped abruptly. He could hear voices of, 'There's a fire!', and, 'The joint ward is.....!' Even from where he stood in front of the door, he could see white smoke coming from down the corridor.

"Aren't you going to help? Aren't you guys from the SEPB the government's mutt."

".....There's no particularly need for me to go. There should at least be fire extinguishers."

Facing Harukiyo who was smiling with his hands in his pocket, Daisuke replied coolly.

"Oh yeah, fire extinguishers. Those sure are convenient. I'm sure they'll be able to extinguish the fire using those. —If that was just an ordinary fire, that is."

Flustered voices of, 'I-it can't be extinguished.....?', and, 'There's still people inside—' reached Daisuke who creased his eyebrows. It was followed by shouts of what was most likely the names of the patients in order to confirm their safety.

*Don't tell me..... did this guy do something?*

Daisuke glared at Harukiyo. There were no signs of the tattooed youth making any movement. However, he had been making several incomprehensible actions calmly since just now. Those might have been him laying down preparations for an escape route beforehand.

However, Daisuke did not move from the spot and only glared back at him with a cold gaze. He excluded the screams of despair coming behind him from his mind.

"That doesn't matter to me. Saving lives is not my duty."

*"Kuku."*

Harukiyo laughed amusedly. —Among the ways he laughed so far, this one irritated Daisuke the most.

"Heh heh, nice gaze. That's the look of someone willing to throw human lives away."

*"....."*

“Fine then, let’s get along together as fellow inhuman scums. I’ll answer your questions. What was it, whom did I heard about Hanashiro Mari from? To answer that, I’ll have to begin from that delightful yet despondent man. That guy is the type of person I hate the most in the world. He’s the kind of person that is let alone half-hearted, he gives up from the get go making him filled with laments, having led a life that is beyond idiotic and can only be described as laughable.”

Harukiyo began to narrate in an exaggerated manner, looking to be enjoying himself greatly. Daisuke had no idea what made him so cheery. —For some reason, the fire seemed to still be blazing. The shrieks of the staffs were endless.

“Even till the end, he was still the same. Isn’t that just hilarious? I wonder what kind of life had he led that made him so negative? Personally, I just don't get it—”

“.....Enough with the nonsense. Who are you talking about.”

“Hmm? What’s up, you getting anxious? If you’re worried about the time, there’s plenty to spare, at least for me. Aah, fine, fine. I know that you have your own position to consider about too.”

Harukiyo snickered.

Shrill cries for help resounded nonstop in the background.

Daisuke remain rooted to his spot. With a focused and collected gaze, he looked straight at the youth in front of him. There was no way he was going to let the only clue he found at long last escape before him. No matter what.

“He is none other than the one who turned Hanashiro Mari into a Mushitsuki—that woman from SEPB called him *Sanbikime*.”

“.....!”

*Sanbikime*. That was one of the *Original Three* that gave rise Fusion Type Mushitsuki.

If that was true, it would be a huge step towards the elucidation of the mysterious *Sanbikime*. Also, it should have some knowledge about Hanashiro

Mari as well.

“After he left Akamaki City, he went to someplace called Aoharima Island—well, just a random small island to hide himself. It was there where I met him. That was also when I heard about the girl known as Hanashiro Mari from him. I was so happy to hear it from him, you know? About the fact that currently..... she was probably the strongest Mushitsuki.”

“Where is he right now—”

Daisuke reflexively grabbed the youths collar. However, his words were drowned out by the sound of screams.

His body froze, as if he was bound by chains.

“Ah? What was that? I can’t hear you.”

“Where is that guy..... right now.....”

—Arisu’s tear-streaked face from this morning floated into his mind.

Daisuke’s face twisted.

*Why is she appearing in my mind at a time like this.....? My duty is to investigate Hanashiro Mari. Whatever happens to other people is none of my concern.*

He could not let the only clue he got after so long slip away from right under his nose. At least, his past self would have executed the mission flawlessly without hesitation. The him from before getting involved with the girl known as Ichinokuro Arisu.

“He was known as *Sensei* at the island.”

Harukiyo continued in a barefaced tone.

“You ask where is that bastard at right now? Aah, please wait a moment. Let me recall that for you right away.”

The screams of despair reaching his ears hit their peak.

—*Stupid Daisuke.*

The face of Arisu as she smiled with a sigh came up in his mind.

His arm that was grabbing onto Harukiyo trembled.

*This then is my duty—those unrelated to the mission—if it was Arisu—there's no other chance to get information about Sanbikime—.*

“—Help!”

A shriek interrupted Daisuke's thoughts.

What appeared in his mind next was Hanashiro Mari's cruel smile.

*“.....Kakkou!”*

Daisuke shouted.

The Cleridae on his shoulder transformed rapidly. It turned into green feelers that slipped between his clothing and fused with his flesh. A green pattern ran across his cheeks.

*Hanashiro Mari.....! You and I may be similar in some ways. But—.*

He released his arm from Harukiyo and turned to his back. With all his strength, he sprinted down the corridor towards the source of the smoke.

*“Hah hah!”*

Behind him, he could hear the tremendously delightful laughter of the tattooed youth.

*I will not drag those who are uninvolved into the battle of Mushitsuki.....!*

“Out of the way!”

Smoke spewed out from the joint ward at the end of the corridor. The door was enveloped in bright red flames. At the feet of the staffs and patients who were looking from a distance were burnt markings and empty fire extinguishers. Daisuke pushed his way through them and stood in front of the blaze.

Hot air immediately seethed over his whole body.

Screams and shrieks could be heard from beyond the door.

“Get away from there.....!”

With a shout of warning towards the people behind the door, Daisuke raised his right fist wrapped in a green pattern.

The sound of the blazing door being smashed rang down the corridor.

Daisuke grasped the flaming door with his hand tightly.

*“Guh.....!”*

The sensation of skin and flesh being burnt shot up his arm, bringing intense pain. Even with his face distorting in pain, Daisuke used his superhuman strength to rip the door right from its hinge.

Wood splinters accompanied by kindles scattered around the feet of the surrounding people.

Biting back the pain coming from his arms, Daisuke stepped into the room immediately—.

*“.....!”*

Including Daisuke, all the people on the scene took a gulp.

The flame had not spread a single inch in the joint ward. The patients in the ward were all gathered around the window away from the door. He did not see anyone who was hurt amongst them, only looks of relief and doubts on their faces.

Daisuke turned around.

The only thing that was burnt was the scattered pieces of the door. There was not a single trace of burnt marking on the walls or the ceiling, much less the flowers placed by the side.

With a start, he looked at his right hand.

He definitely felt pain coming from there just now, but there was not a single burn.

*—If that was just an ordinary fire, that is.*

He recalled the words uttered by Harukiyo.

Daisuke turned back and returned to Hanashiro Mari’s room in a dash.

But—.

The room with curtains fluttering was a scene of peace. It was as if nobody

had been to the room in the very first place.

The sound of Daisuke punching the wall reverberated throughout the entire third storey.



## Part 3

The Ichinokuro residence was located in the centre of Akamaki City, at the high-end residential area.

Many of the students from Horusu Seijou Academy lived near the new residential area on the hill near the station. However, being a distinguished family with long-standing history, the Ichinokuro house resided in the centre of the city with large premises.

In the darkened streets of the residential area, Daisuke walked along the long fence of the Ichinokuro residence. Thereupon, a voice came at him from above.

“Yo, *Kakkou*. How’re you feeling?”

A shadow jumped down from the fence light-footedly without making a sound.

A head of brilliant blond hair appeared from the darkness of the night illuminated by the street lamps. It was a girl about the same age as Daisuke with upwards slanting eyes like that of a cat. She was wearing the same Horusu Seijou Academy uniform as Arisu. Her identity was that of *Kasuou*, a member of the Central Headquarters sent to relieve Daisuke from the monitoring of Arisu.

“The worst.”

“Hm? Did something happen? You sure look under the weather.”

She walked up next to Daisuke who continued without turning to face her. Despite her elegant features, her manner of speaking was very coarse. —It seems that he had an affinity with people who spoke crudely today.

*That Harukiyo fellow..... I should probably keep quiet about him to Arisu. I have a feeling that he’s dangerous—.*

With such thoughts in mind, he glimpsed to the side towards the girl.

“Nevermind, that was nothing. More importantly, *Kasuou*. How was Arisu? I sure hope nothing strange happened.”

“She’d be well-behaved. —Or so I wanted to say. I went close to her out of a wee bit of curiosity and found her muttering all to herself the whole time. It was something along the lines of, ‘Daisuke that idiot..... he doesn’t even know how I feel. Really, just what is he thinking’. *Gahaha*. It was just as you said, she sure was furious.”

“.....I did made fun of her close friend, of course she’d be angry.”

It seemed like Arisu still held a grudge. This further fanned the flames of irritation from having let that youth called Harukiyo escape earlier.

“Huh? Isn’t that kind of wrong? I’ve only observed her for one day, but I’ve already grasped hold of her personality. Looks like the great me is pretty suited to be part of the surveillance team.”

“Stop daydreaming. ....But, what do you mean. Is there some other reason?”

“Nope, not telling. After all, it seems far more interesting to leave it be.”

*Kasuou* spouted incomprehensibly, causing Daisuke to feel a headache building up.

“Just spare me the trouble already..... I’m so done with this mission that I wanna escape elsewhere already.”

“Oi oi, isn't it for this mission that they moved the Blaze Class Rank 1 you to the surveillance team? Not to mention, the one acting as your substitute is me. That means that rather than secrecy, fighting strength is more important for this mission. Isn’t that interesting. If you’d like, how about passing the mission onto me. I’ve just finished a long-term mission too as well.”

“If it was left up to a battle maniac like you, you’d probably get into a fight with Arisu within a day and end up destroying everything in the surroundings. You had better act like we don't know each other even if we meet in school. Another thing, I’m no longer Rank 1 anymore, I was just demoted yesterday.”

“Huh? You kidding me? So I guess the next Rank 1 is gonna be me.”

“You keep thinking that. What can someone unranked like you who only have

the ability to destroy things do. In short, someone like you is only useful if it's for a day..... Rather, what kind of shoddy mission is it that even requires your help?"

"Do you actually dislike me that much.....? That was completely uncalled for. However, I can't tell you about my mission as that is confidential."

"Well, not like I'm going to force it out of you. —It's fine up to here for today. Thanks for the help. I think my head is going to explode if I continue to hear someone talking like that any further."

"Aah? Then, would this be better? .....Ah, ah, I look forward to seeing you again tomorrow then, Kusuriya-kun."

*Kasuou* changed her tone out of a sudden. She came to a stop and smiled with a grin.

"It sure is pretty hard for us both to feign friendliness outside of the mission, isn't it?"

".....You're probably overdoing it on that part."

Seeing Daisuke heave a sigh, *Kasuou* spitted out with an endearing smile on her face, 'Shut it, I know what I'm doing'.

Right before he was about to enter the gate, Daisuke thought of something and came to a stop.

"*Kasuou.*"

"Yes?"

About to return, *Kasuou* turned back.

"Can you take over the monitoring for tomorrow as well. The whole day, starting from morning."

"Well, it's not like I mind, but..... does Kusuriya-kun have something on?"

"There's something I want to check. And also—"

*Kasuou* looked back in wonder at Daisuke who was hesitating for words.

"What..... reason are you fighting for?"

“Huh?”

Seeing the girl widen her eyes, Daisuke was at a loss for words.

Hanashiro Mari, a Mushitsuki that resembled him, was dead.

It was as if it foretold the future of Daisuke himself. No matter what he did, or how strong the feelings he held, in the end—.

“What if for example, there’s an enemy right in front of your eyes, but also civilians asking for help next to you as well. What would you.....”

Not knowing what he was speaking about anymore, his mouth came to a shut.

Nevermind, that was nothing—just when he was about to say that, he took a gulp.

*Kasuou* was glaring daggers at him. Her blue iris pierced right through him as if they were knives.

“Obviously I’d slaughter the enemy.”

“.....Yea, I guess you’re right.”

“Don’t you dare lose your balls, *Kakkou*. Surely you didn't forget how you became Blaze Class Rank 1, huh? Rather than help one or two person, you’ve turned several ten, hundred times the number into Fallen. And that is not going to change now, or ever.”

Clicking her tongue, *Kasuou* stared straight at Daisuke.

“You said that you were demoted from Blaze Class Rank 1, right. Do you still not get what that means?”

“.....”

“If you ever hesitate, or come to a stop..... If you run away, that is when I will come to butcher you myself personally.”



Watching the blond figure disappear into the darkness leaving those words, Daisuke heaved a long sigh.

*It's just as Kasuou said. What is wrong with me..... this whole time, ever since morning—.*

Was it because of the dream about the past.

Or was it because of the slap by Arisu.

*Be it letting the clue found after long last slip away, or even showing weakness..... what a display of pathetic blunders.*

Pulling open the antique wooden gate, he entered the premises.

Walking along the stone paving, he approached the main building.

“.....”

There, he encountered Arisu.

She must have been waiting for him to return. Dressed in her pyjamas, Arisu stared down at Daisuke with her arms crossed imposingly.

She did not open her mouth and a heavy silence descended between the two.

*Shouldn't you be the one apologising. Damn it, that's the problem with brats.....*

Grouching on the inside, he said with a sigh.

“Fine fine, that was my bad. For insulting Hanashiro Mari.”

“.....”

“Shouldn't this be enough to appease your anger? This should be fine, right. Oh, and I am taking a break from school tomorrow—”

He closed his mouth halfway.

Arisu had sucked in a deep breath. Then, she bellowed at Daisuke fiercely with all her anger.

“Stupid Daisuke!”

Daisuke was stupefied. Arisu then walked down the corridor with an extremely peeved look.

The headache that he felt from just now throbbed more and more heavily.

*What a terrible day.*

*Nothing I did went the way I wanted it to.*

*There's so many things that I don't even know.*

*"I don't even get what's going on anymore....."*

*For now, I'll just go to sleep and forget about everything.*

## Part 4

He had entered the organisation known as the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

From the moment he turned the Mushitsuki called *Fuyuhotaru* into a Fallen, Kusuriya Daisuke began his life of being *Kakkou*.

Two years had passed since then.

Living without wavering, time passed by quickly.

All the while fighting, hurting others, and barely surviving, he found that he had been branded as the Reaper when he looked back.

However, he met the girl called Ichinokuro Arisu.

That time began to slow down—that was no doubt due to Arisu, who dragged him along with her flow. From morning when he opens his eyes till night when he goes to sleep, she would get him wrapped up in all sorts of trouble and give rise to his headache.

Perhaps it was due to his tension loosening, that it became hard for him to get up in the morning recently.

Just speaking of yesterday, if not for Arisu forcefully waking him from his slumber, who knew if he would have woken up—.

Supposing.

If the girl who entrusted her dream with him all those years ago, *Fuyuhotaru*, saw the current him, what would she think? If it was her who used to have the same dream as him, would her time still continue to flow the same?

[Please proceed forwards for sterilisation.]

Daisuke advanced into the steam-filled world.

*Say, Fuyuhotaru. Do you still remember that promise.....?*



As he proceeded, the steam dissipated. Before him stood a sturdy-looking door, and a box on the wall contained a set of black suits. It was made of a thin fabric that hugged the body and a zipper ran from the waist till the neck. On the surface of both arms and legs were plastic zippers. Those were probably meant to fit snugly with the body, allowing anything hidden to be seen easily. It was the same bodysuit as the one Arisu wore the other time she came here.

They promised each other to never forget their dreams.

As Daisuke passed his arm through the sleeve, he murmured in his heart.

*Could it be that..... we made a promise that could not be fulfilled?*

He came before the door.

[East Central Branch member, *Kakkou*, confirmed. Please enter.]

The sensor above his head glowed red, and the door slid open from both sides.

Following that, another door further in, followed by yet another door, for a total of four doors, opened sequentially.

He was in the underground facility in Akamaki City, the base of operations of the Central Headquarters of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. This was the location where civilian members held meetings for the search and experimentation of Mushitsuki, while Mushitsuki members are accommodated and undergo training.

As a result of the inmate uprising the other day, the regulation of security within the facility has been intensified. Most likely out of fear of the Mushitsuki, personal belongings were completely prohibited, and all members are subjected to strict body checks. All Mushitsuki apart from those belonging to the Central Headquarters are required to wear their own suits in the facility.

However, the use of safety chokers had been scrapped after the case with Rina's Mushi going berserk. Whether or not there would be another system to replace that remains to be seen.

A light commotion was raised when Daisuke walked down the walkway. He was used to such response, but something felt off from the usual.

“.....?”

What dwelled in the eyes of those who passed by him in the past was fear towards *Kakkou*. However, their gazes were different today. They could be said to be indifferent gazes, and there were even some that appears to be sneering.

Knitting his eyebrows, the whispers of the other Mushitsuki members came into his ears. Smiles of scorn appeared on their faces along with, ‘It’s *Kakkou*’, ‘Yea, it turns out that even the Reaper was only human in the end’.

Realising what the situation was, Daisuke was flabbergasted.

*—You said that you were demoted from Blaze Class Rank 1, right. Do you still not get what that means?*

He recalled the words *Kasuou* said.

Feeling unbelieving, he walked down the corridor.

Not a single person averted from his path. They were all whispering in voices that mocked and cursed him.

*I can’t believe this—.*

From the day he turned *Fuyuhotaru* into a Fallen.

He had been fighting all these times. He had despatched off all enemies that appeared in his sights without mercy and turned fellow Mushitsuki into Fallen without getting close to any single person. Despite being branded as the Reaper and rebuked as a traitor, even so he continued to only face forward and get stronger than anyone else.

*Just from losing the title of Blaze Class Rank 1, everything I’ve done so far..... all of it amounts to nothing.....?*

His nails dug into his flesh in his clenched fist.

Blaze Class Rank 1.

That was undoubtedly the proof of being the strongest Mushitsuki. The title of the one who stands above all other Mushitsuki as the symbol of fear.

*—He would end the fight between Mushitsuki. Until the day comes when Fuyuhotaru can return without fighting.*

All the things he had built up from bearing the immense pain and solitude, so much so that he had to gnash his teeth.

They all came crashing down with a roar.

“Damn it.....!”

He groaned unconsciously. Fury and regret caused his shoulders to tremble.

Bearing the gaze of disdain on him wherever he went, he reached the room of his objective.

That room was the Navigator Room. It was the room where information for the members engaged in missions were disseminated, and where they received orders from their goggles in real-time.

He placed his palm on the automatic sensor by the wall.

[Fingerprint acknowledged. Please input your verification number.]

Following the voice acknowledgement, Daisuke punched in the number pad next to the sensor.

[Error.]

Words of entry being denied appeared on the display. When he repeated the procedure again, he got the same result. In order to go proceed even further in, he would require the authorisation of those inside, but he couldn't even make it till that point.

“Damn this—”

Right when he raised his fist in vexation.

“.....*Kakkou-kun*.....?”

A familiar voice reached his ears. When he turned around, he found a tall girl standing over there.

It was Yomori Neiko. She was a Mushitsuki that was captured under his hands with Arisu around. With an absentminded look on her face as always, she approached wobbily.

“*Nene*, huh. Just the right time, lend me your hand for a bit.”

“What.....? Overtime practise just ended..... I want to return to my room..... and sleep.....”

“Stop fussing, just come here already. Hey, don't you run away.”

“.....Aah.....”

“What’s your verification number? And don't tell anyone that I’m the one that entered. Just pretend that you’re the one who entered.”

“But, that’s..... a violation of rule.....”

“What are you doing, *Kakkou*?”

A detached voice called out to him from behind.

A group of people in suits stood at the head of the corridor. The one standing at the front was the person who handed down his demotion to him, Miguruma Yaeko.

“*K-Kakkou*.....? That child is.....?”

One of the middle-aged man’s expression changed. On the other hand, Yaeko looked towards Daisuke coolly and turned back to the man.

“I shall leave the inspection of the Navigator Room for another occasion, Vice-director. Someone else shall guide you to the Operations Room. I will take my leave here.”

Saying so without faltering, Yaeko turned away from the group and approached Daisuke without waiting for a reply.

Daisuke released Neiko’s arm with a, ‘It’s fine now’. Neiko appeared baffled, but she just left with unsteady footsteps.

“I see you have not replied me. Did you not hear my question perhaps?”

Similar to the other day, she came to within close proximity of him with a gentle smile on her face.

“Can’t you tell with your eyes. Since I couldn’t get into contact with the intelligence team through call due to the invalidation of my verification number, I just came here directly.”

“In light of the re-evaluation due to your demotion, it may take some time for

the issuance of a new verification number. I believe this had been explained to you, *Kakkou*. Aren't you being too hasty?"

"....."

"I shall pass you my direct contact number. Please direct all reports regarding Hanashiro Mari and Ichinokuro Arisu through here. I shall emphasise once again, do refrain from any overly rash actions. Your current behaviour is grounds for punishment, but I shall turn a blind eye to it this time."

Narrowing her already thin-slit eyes, Yaeko held out a piece of paper that appeared to be a business card. Daisuke roughly snatched it from her.

"That's right—this is just the perfect chance. Truthfully speaking, I wanted to consider it for some more time, but seeing as you are already here, let's get it over with first. Follow me."

Without waiting for Daisuke's acknowledgement, Yaeko started walking with a smile plastered on her face.

Daisuke remained motionless while glaring at Yaeko.

"What is the matter? This is an order, you know."

Now that Daisuke thought about it, it all started since he came to Akamaki City.

How everything he that did failed to turn out well.

Whether be it about Hanashiro Mari, or Ichinokuro Arisu.

Ever since he got caught up in the strange connection between the two girls, he started making all sorts of mistakes. In a situation where he was supposed to prioritise his mission, the mere thought of a girl that slapped him caused him to let escape his only clue right before his very eyes.

In addition—he lost the absolute, intangible authority known as Blaze Class Rank 1.

In order to retrieve everything, to return all to their original position, he had to complete this mission regarding those girls even one second faster.

"A guy known as *Sensei* was in contact with Hanashiro Mari. —He might be

*Sanbikime."*

Daisuke spoke in a low voice.

Yaeko's countenance remained unchanged. Much less move, a slick smile formed on her face as if naturally.

"From whom did you hear that from? I believe that we have decided that the truth is not to be established from *Kororo's* ability."

Daisuke's face twisted.

"I knew it..... You've already known about it! Why did you conceal this, answer me!"

Yaeko brought her face close to Daisuke who pressed her for an answer. Her mouth was so close to his ear that he could almost hear her breathing.

"Calm down, *Kakkou*. Let us speak while walking."

The coldness of the hand that was placed around his cheek sent shivers down his back. From the close proximity, he seemed to feel a shadow in the depths of her pupil that paralysed his body. It felt as if he was being restrained by invisible chains.

"There is no way that I would hide anything from you. After all, I deeply love each and every one of you, especially you who is excellent. So, please do not hide anything from me as well. Show your love for me too, *Kakkou*."

"....."

"Who did you hear that from?"

At a distance where the tip of their nose was about to touch, Yaeko's gaze queried him.

*What the hell is she—.*

Daisuke scarcely managed to close his mouth that was about to open involuntarily. He struggled to retain his self-control desperately which was being eroded by the abnormal atmosphere projected by Yaeko.

It would be best for him to keep quiet about the youth who named himself as Sehateno Harukiyo. That was what he felt instinctively. Contrary to Yaeko's

words, there were no doubts that Central Headquarters was hiding something important. In order to draw that out, there was a need for Daisuke to hold some cards of his own.

But, at the same time, he felt like clicking his tongue.

*It's almost as if I don't even know what I'm fighting against.....!*

Seeing Daisuke keep his mouth clamped tight, Yaeko remained all smiles.

"I see, that is fine by me too. Withholding of secrets is a violation of order, but I understand that we have just gotten to know each other. Forming a trusting relationship is of utmost importance. For us to love each other, trusting one another is paramount."

Her smile unfading, Yaeko walked down the passageway. Daisuke hesitated, but decided to follow behind her a few steps back. Freed from the formless chains, his heart was still beating wildly.

"It is just as you said. We have confirmed that Hanashiro Mari was in contact with an existence that appears to be *Sanbikime*."

The clacking of her footsteps echoed in the corridor.

Daisuke frowned. However, before he could open his mouth, Yaeko continued.

"It appears that you have misunderstood something."

".....Misunderstood?"

"It is not that we have concealed this matter. —Indeed, the fact that we exercised extreme caution in not allowing this piece of information to spread is due to its secrecy. However, if deemed necessary, this information would have been provided to you as well."

As he walked down the path, Daisuke furrowed his brows.

The bureau members walking down from the opposite direction all made way to them with fearful expressions.

It had already become a common sight to him, but the reason for their fear should have been lost already. Looking more carefully, he found that their gazes

of trepidation were directed towards Miguruma Yaeko instead of him.

“One year ago, Hanashiro Mari died from her illness. At that time, it became clear that something thought to be *Sanbikime* was nearby, and a mission to capture it was executed. The one who was in charge of that mission was me. It was a mission that proceeded in absolute secrecy around one year ago. Around that period, the matters regarding Ichinokuro Arisu occurred. —In other words, these two missions were completely unrelated to each other.”

Daisuke furrowed his eyebrows.

*If what Miguruma said was the truth—.*

“You said you were chasing *Sanbikime*? Then, the fact that you are here now means—”

“The mission was completed.”

Yaeko turned around to face Daisuke who followed diagonally behind her.

“We succeeded in cornering it to a place called Aoharima Island, and as result of the judgement that capture was difficult, we exterminated it.”

Daisuke widened his eyes.

One of the *Original Three* was exterminated. This means that there would no longer be any new Fusion Type Mushitsuki birthed.

Yaeko faced the front and started walking again.

“Unfortunately, due to some disturbances, the confirmation for this matter encountered some difficulties, but..... with the fact that there has been no new discovery of Fusion Type Mushitsuki up till this day, we may conclude that the existence known as *Sanbikime* is gone from this world. It is not my intention to withhold information with regards to that, but we can't afford to make the mistake of giving it time and allowing it to escape.”

“.....”

“That concludes my explanation. To add on, the nature of the connection between Hanashiro Mari and Ichinokuro Arisu remains a sceptical one to us. A Mushi which remains after the death of its host..... not to mention, is capable to possessing another person appears to be far too irregular to our eyes. We



also cannot exclude the possibility of it being a wholly different entity, one that merely has the same appearance and ability. Rather, that should be the obvious conclusion, should it not?”

Daisuke understood what Yaeko was getting at.

“But, the memories of the Morpho butterfly as shown by *Kororo*’s ability was that of Hanashiro Mari’s.”

Yaeko made a glimpse at Daisuke. Her lips raised into a smile of satisfaction.

“Excellent, *Kakkou*. —It is just as you said. The memories of the Mushi does not lie. We cannot deny that the Morpho butterfly possessing Ichinokuro Arisu used to belong to Hanashiro Mari. In the aftermath of dealing with the search for *Sanbikime*—I have returned to the Central Headquarters to hunt down the person who obstructed us then.”

Yaeko suddenly retrieved her mobile phone from her pocket. It seems like she was getting into contact with somebody. He heard her saying, ‘I would like to know the situation of our target, thus, I will be heading over now’.

Without any changes to her pacing, Yaeko ended the call.

Turning around at the corridor, they came before an elevator.

The door to the elevator opened, and Yaeko followed by Daisuke entered. The door then shut, and the elevator began to descend.

Silence fell between the two.

—*What she said was sound.*

Looking at the time frame involved, Yaeko’s explanation made sense. It should have been impossible for the Mushi of a certain Mushitsuki to randomly possess another individual.

However—.

“In that case, why was the incident that occurred at Horusu Seijou Academy assigned to me who belonged to the East Central Branch?”

Looking forwards straight at the door, Yaeko smiled.

“I know that it is not uncommon for other branches to request for

reinforcements due to a lack of personnel. However, the mission that was explained to me was far too simple. Haji—that is, my Branch director, often said, ‘You, who is Blaze Class Rank 1, is special’. It would be strange for the mission assigned for me to not be a ‘relatively challenging’ one.”

“Did you not think of this? That that was merely the oversight of Branch Director Haji.”

Yaeko spoke lightly.

“That you are not the calibre of Blaze Class Rank 1. —In actual fact, ever since coming over to Central Headquarters, you have failed numerous times and had been demoted.”

“.....!”

“Please don't make such a scary expression. I was just joking.”

Yaeko only gave an amused smile at Daisuke clenching his fist.

“You are overthinking this, *Kakkou*. It was only a coincidence that when you came to Central Headquarters, you were assigned to the monitoring of Ichinokuro Arisu. That is all. All that is required of you is to put your all into fulfilling the mission.”

Yaeko's thin-slit eyes looked down at Daisuke. Her constraining smile coiled around Daisuke's body like a snake.

“You just need to ensure a satisfactory result, one that is worthy of my love in you.”

Daisuke glared at Yaeko grimly.

There were probably some truths in what the person in front of him had said. However, there were also untruths in the crux of the matter. That was what he felt keenly. What a master manipulator she was.

“I see you are finally satisfied. In that case, let me inform you of your mission for today. I have mentioned this earlier, but there was someone trying to hinder us during the search for *Sanbikime*. We have been chasing him down until recently, but the situation reversed just as we were coming to a close. Perhaps he could be said to be withdrawing when we push, and push while we

withdraw. It was just yesterday when he appeared right before us and we apprehended him.”

The elevator display changed above Daisuke who creased his eyebrows. The facility they were in comprised of many different strata. Each stratum was separate from another through considerable distance, and the only thing connecting them was the elevator, the ventilation duct, and the transmission wirings.

“Why was *he* impeding our way and why did he choose to appear before us at this time—we are beginning our interrogation of him right now. At first, I was thinking of weakening him by leaving him be for a few days, but..... since you are here, we should be able to avert most of the risk. In addition, I request that you keep silent about his matters such that this does not spread out.”

“.....?”

Daisuke raised his head all of a sudden.

He had felt a slight tremor. It seems that Yaeko had not felt it.

*What is this tremor.....? Also, this smell..... something is—.*

An electronic beep rang out.

They had reached their floor.

By that time, the rumbling was getting stronger in intensity. It was as if it had been storing up energy. And now, it seemed ready to burst—.

“Do you understand? I have high expectations of you.”

The sound of air rushing by came from the door.

*Something dangerous..... is coming!*

By the time a green Cleridae appeared on Daisuke’s shoulder, the elevator door was already half-opened.

What he saw was the flames of an explosion heading their way.

## Part 5

*“Ugh—”*

The crimson hell fire that propagated throughout his vision.

And the opening door.

Before Daisuke’s mind even comprehended what was happening, his body moved on its own.

The body of the Cleridae morphed into a mass of feelers which fused with his body as if imprinting onto him. He grasped the elevator doors with his hands which were covered in a green pattern, digging deeply into the door made of a metal alloy.

*“.....Ooooh!”*

The shrill noise of metal creaking echoed inside the elevator. With his superhuman strength, Daisuke forcefully pulled close the opening doors. He then immediately turned around from the door left with his handprint and pushed Miguruma Yaeko against the back wall.



“.....!”

An overwhelming shockwave hit the back of Daisuke who covered Yaeko with his body. If he wasn't supporting his body against the wall, he would not have been able to remain standing. The doors of the elevator deformed, but it wasn't enough to withstand the shockwave and he was hit by an impact.

The blast travelled through the outside of the elevator and reverberated down the elevator shaft. The devastating volume paralysed his eardrums, causing him temporary deafness.

“Gu..... uu.....!”

An alarm sounded in the remnants of the explosion. The synthesised voice making the announcement was probably calling for an alert, but Daisuke could only barely make it out with his numbed eardrums. However, even that soon trailed off into noise.

“.....I see. So that is what happened.”

When his eyes met with that of the woman in his arms, a chill ran down his back.

There was a smile of enjoyment on the face of Miguruma Yaeko.

Her narrow eyes looked straight ahead, seeing past Daisuke into the interior of the unobservable passageway. With fluid movements like that of a puppet, she retrieved her mobile phone from the pocket of her suit and placed it to her ear.

“I cannot seem to get through. Either the relay is destroyed, or perhaps the communication system is charred. There is a need for us to go check it. We need to confirm the extent of damage as well.”

“.....”

“What is the matter? I am saying that we need to move from here.”

Yaeko coolheadedly passed down an order to the dumbfounded Daisuke.

“Guh.....!”

Bearing the intense pain shooting from his back, Daisuke distanced himself

from his superior. The lights had cracked, scattering glass fragments all over the floor. With a lurch, he fell onto the glass-littered ground, cutting his forehead sending blood flowing.

“What the hell..... just happened?”

The elevator doors were bent towards the insides as if it was hit by a wrecking ball. That plainly showed just how powerful the explosion was.

“There is a need for us to determine that is exactly what I have said. I hope that you have not lost your rationality over a trifle matter like that, *Kakkou*.”

Yaeko placed her hand over the misshapen door and said in a tone like that of a mother admonishing her child.

“To think that you used to be Blaze Class Rank 1, I see that you still a child after all..... Fret not. I shall issue the commands, you need only to follow them.”

“.....!”

Daisuke unconsciously clenched his fists, but he bit down his teeth to suppress his anger. Yaeko’s calmness was abnormal, but they were currently not in a situation for an argument.

He placed his ear to the door, listening for the state of affairs on the opposite side.

There was still the sound of explosions, but they seem to be getting further. He also did not feel the severe heat anymore. He placed his hands on the now crushed together doors.

“Stand down.”

When he exerted some strength, one side of the door easily fell inwards. The shaft seemed to have been weakened from the explosion and broke under his strength.

“Wha—”

Looking at the scene ahead, he instinctively took a gulp.

The flames that he saw right before he shut the doors must have been scattered by the shockwave. The vestiges of destruction spoke of the power of

the explosion. The walls appeared to be relatively undamaged owing to their strengthened construction for bearing the pressure of being underground, but all the doors along the passageway were reduced to rubble beyond recognition. The lightings installed into the ceiling were turned into molten glass and coating by the blaze which rained down. Nothing could be heard apart from the warning alarm and the sound of explosions in the distance.

Right beside them was someone in a white coat and goggles collapsed. He was probably here to escort Yaeko. He managed to escape losing his life thanks to the heat-resistant coat and had just lost consciousness.

“!”

Another explosion occurred.

A ball of flame shot out from a room which had lost its door and disappeared beyond the crossway. That was not all. Just then, fireballs which seemed to have a life of their own flew past all around their view.

“.....! Oi, wait!”

Daisuke grasped the arm of Yaeko who walked ahead unperturbed.

“What is it? If we do not act post-haste, the damage will only worsen further, *Kakkou*. Also, I do not have any hopes of that incompetent Vice-director being able to issue the appropriate commands.”

“What are you, an idiot! No matter how you look at it, it’s far too dangerous! Do not move from here!”

“Indeed, this is an emergency. As such, I shall overlook your affront towards a superior for this time only. Do take note to mind your words in the future.”

Even after witnessing such a hellish carnage, she still spoke in a mild tone. Her chain-like smile wrapped itself around Daisuke.

“Come now, let us move. I have an idea of what is cause behind this. In addition, there is a need for us to hurry. We absolutely cannot leave this to that inept oaf.”

Leaving behind the frozen Daisuke, Yaeko stepped into the passageway. Bathed in the rain of fire, a portion of her suit was scorched. Even so, her smile



never crumbled.

“Let’s look for a functioning electronic device. After that, we will head to a certain location.”

“.....Damn it!”

Clicking his tongue, Daisuke got into motion. He removed the coat from the collapsed bureau member and placed him in the relatively safer interior of the elevator.

He then chased after Yaeko who had proceed without him and roughly put the white coat over her.

“I guess it is dangerous no matter where you go..... Where’s the first place we’re going.”

“To the Monitor Room about two hundred metres away. If we manage to secure a means of communicating with the upper levels, I can get to the Navigator Room to pass down orders.”

Yaeko, with the white coat draped around her shoulders, only ever looked to the front. —In the end, she did not even bat an eyelid at the member that was collapsed on the ground. Daisuke couldn’t even begin to imagine what was she looking at.

“.....!”

An explosion blasted out from the front. The potent shockwave sent the remains of a door flying towards them.

He instantly shoved Yaeko into a room on the side and jumped in himself.

*“Guah!”*

Failing to dodge it completely, a sharp metal fragment sliced his shoulder.

“Looks like I was right to order most of the personnel to evacuate from this level.”

Ignoring Daisuke who fell to the ground on his knees, Yaeko returned to the passageway.

“Evacuate, you say.....? Just what is on this floor?”

She remained silent to Daisuke's query as he picked himself off the floor holding his shoulder. Daisuke clicked his tongue.

".....You damned woman.....!"

"I did mention that I would overlook your affront only once. Consider if your addressee is not me."

The two advanced down the passageway peppered by spitting flames. Daisuke acted as a substitute for the debris raining from the ceiling and as a shield for the proximate explosions for Yaeko.

"The Monitor Room is beyond this wall. We should see the entrance before long."

Yaeko pushed on a breakneck speed, while Daisuke chased from behind with heavy breathing.

"Oi....."

"What is it?"

"What kind of fellow..... is *Sanbikime*?"

Her expression did not even change at the abrupt question.

—Daisuke did not know anything about the entity that turned him into a Mushitsuki. Just who was it that caused him to live the life of a Mushitsuki; he wanted to know what was it that made him such that he could only lead a life of fighting. But, what he wanted to know above all else was—.

Just what feelings did it had when it conversed with Hanashiro Mari.

What did it speak about to the girl which it had cursed to an unfortunate fate. And also, why did Hanashiro Mari not resent that which had turned her into a Mushitsuki.

Daisuke wanted to know that.

"That is unknown."

Yaeko replied in an unchanging tone.

"We did not manage to get in direct contact with the target. —Because we laid waste to the entire island where it concealed itself."

—*Screech.*

The sound of something creaking came from above their head.

Daisuke stopped in his tracks.

“What..... did you say?”

“Apart from the few survivors, there were no other living residents confirmed. In other words, they were exterminated along with *Sanbikime*.”

—*Creak.*

The ceiling distorted right before their eyes.

“Looks like the heat has weakened the structural integrity. Let us hurry, I can see the entrance.”

A crimson conflagration filled the vision of Daisuke as he stood rooted to the ground.

The entrance to the Monitor Room was swallowed by explosive fumes which spurted out from the room opposite. The inferno spewed out with great ferocity that showed no signs of stopping.

“.....It will be more roundabout, but let us make a detour.”

Yaeko turned around from where Daisuke is. The ground quaked, and a large fire appeared before her eyes.

—An explosion blasted from behind them, filling the passage with flames.

As a result, the two of them were trapped in the straight pathway from both sides.

“You..... killed them? Those unrelated people..... who have nothing to do with us Mushitsuki—”

—*Squeak.*

The metal making up the ceiling deformed. A tremor like an earthquake caused them to lose their balance.

“That is unkind of you, *Kakkou*. It is not as if I have killed human beings.”

Facing each other, the darkness at the back of Yaeko’s eyes seemed to sneer.

“As long as one of the *Original Three* is around, there is no knowing if one has been turned into a Mushitsuki or not. For all we know, all of the island’s populace could have been Mushitsuki.”

Yaeko spoke in a kind tone that seemed to embrace the immobilised Daisuke.

“If they were Mushitsuki, then they would not be human, is that not so?”

—Before he even realised, he was grasping the smiling Yaeko’s neck with his hand.

He did not know since when he even closed the distance between them, or why didn’t he just snap her neck there and then.

“Could it be that, *Kakkou*. You still think of yourself as a human?”

Looking down at Daisuke who was filled with killing intent, Yaeko still had a smile on her face.

“Do you still remember *Fuyuhotaru*? Holding supernatural power, she was a monster that drove the past SEPB to near annihilation. The ones who controls Mushi, something that should not exist in this world, are the Mushitsuki. Yet, *Fuyuhotaru* crushed all of them like they were insects. —What about you, who is even capable of suppressing such a monster? Who was the one who went on to turn even more Mushitsuki into Fallen one after another? Do you still yearn to be labelled as a human after accomplishing all that?”

If it was about himself, he had already given up. He was also used to being called a monster.

However, if this woman in front of him dares to.

The girl who entrusted her dream to Daisuke two years ago—.

And Hanashiro Mari who had a close friend who would get mad just from having her being slightly made fun of—.

And also, all the other Mushitsuki..... who live desperately for the sake of themselves and their dreams—.

If she dares to say that they not human.

Most likely, he would.

“But, do not worry.”

Yaeko smiled compassionately like that of a saint.

“I would still love all of you even though you are monsters.”

Without hesitation.

Daisuke slowly exerted strength into the hand grasping her neck—.

—*Stop it!*

When he heard a voice.

“.....!”

Just like the time when he was about to turn the Mushitsuki called Yomori Neiko into a Fallen.

Like that time when he was tormenting a Mushitsuki young man before the eyes of Rina.

As if she was trying to stop Daisuke from crossing the line into becoming a true monster.

—*Daisuke!*

It felt as though he could see the figure of the petite girl standing before him in obstruction.

“Uu..... uuu.....!”

He released his trembling arm from Yaeko. Having lost the target of his rage, he could do nothing but raise a groan.

*In the case, what should I do then.....? What is the right thing I should do?*

“Are you suffering, Kakkou? I shall save you then.”

Yaeko cupped Daisuke’s cheeks with her hands.

“You do not have to think about anything. You do not have to do anything, just accept my love for you.”

And whispered sweetly.

Just that felt terribly soothing to him.

—*Creak.*

A shrill noise came from the ceiling again. The grating sound got louder, and the ceiling gradually buckled down.

“Let us escape from here. I am certain that you are able to do this, *Kakkou*.”

“.....”

Daisuke swatted away her hands and dragged his battered body up.

“*Kakkou?*”

They were assaulted by tremors without end and surrounded back and front by fire spouts. To make matters worse, the ceiling was ready to collapse on them anytime.

Daisuke raised his arm up—and smashed it into the sidewall.

Yaeko’s feet left the ground for a moment. Such unimaginable impact shook the entire floor they were in. The single blow without holding back at all left a bloody imprint of his fist in the wall.

He then continued with his left fist. Once again, his skin tore and scattered blood all over.

Without pausing, he brought down his right fist onto the wall.

Right, followed by left, followed by right and repeat. The sound of fists punching the wall reverberated noisily in the enclosed passageway.

The patterns covering his cheeks and fists released a green glow.

Daisuke felt something important within himself being eroded steadily.

What Mushitsuki utilised was the power of the Mushi. And what the Mushi feed on, is the dream of its host—.

“It seems that you have reached the last of your strength. Even if it is you, *Kakkou*, you are far too feeble.”

He could hear Yaeko heave a sigh. However, he ignored it and continued to punch the wall.

The ceiling sank further.

*—Perhaps, it may be fine to just die at a place like this.*

That too, felt like an exceedingly attractive temptation.

However, he did not stop his fists.

Rather than his bloodied fists, he felt his cheek hurting.

It was the pain from being hit by somebody.

The pain disallowed him to come to a standstill, to sink into nothingness.

The imaginary pain moved Daisuke to action.

There was probably an explosion somewhere else. Along with a vertical shake, the ceiling at the front of the passageway collapsed.

*“It appears that time is up.”*

Gazing at the nearby destruction, Yaeko muttered as if it was someone else’s problem.

*“—Aaaaah!”*

With all his might, Daisuke drove his fist into the wall.

*“Oooh!”*

He gripped the wall with his blood-stained hands and pulled with his full strength.

The wall of the passageway—several tens of metres long, with thickness broader than his body, was torn off.

*“.....”*

The smile disappeared from Yaeko’s face for the first time. Her narrow eyes were slightly widened.

Just as she mentioned, it was a wide room with monitors lining the walls. Daisuke roughly grabbed her wrist and entered the room.

At the same time as when they entered, the passageway behind them collapsed.

*Why did I—.*

He felt his mind to be in a daze and could not think of anything despite the feeling that he was here for some reason.

The green pattern on his skin became astir.

*Why am I here—.*

“Well done, *Kakkou*. There is still one job left for you to do.”

With a smile of satisfaction, Yaeko put on the headphone placed atop one of the panels. After pressing a few more buttons, several monitors came to life.

“Can you hear me, Navigator Room. —Yes, please transmit the extent of damages to me. And also, please activate the bulwarks on the deepest floor to the highest level. That is of utmost importance.”

She relayed order down one after another into the microphone.

“*Kakkou*. Please leave from that exit and head to the Interrogation Room at the end of the passage. Your equipment has already been prepared for you. The cause of our current crisis is located right there.”

At the back of the room, opposite the door locked down by fire was another exit.

“I have judged that it is unnecessary to interrogate him. —Exterminate him.”

Daisuke obeyed the command and ran towards the exit.

“Depending on the result, you may be re-acknowledged to be Blaze Class Rank 1.”

*Blaze Class Rank 1—.*

What meaning did that title hold.

And what did it bring himself.

Something disappeared from inside himself such that he could not even remember what it was.

However, just this he knew.

That no matter what he must do—he had to reclaim it at all costs.

“.....”



He opened the door and dashed down the corridor.

There too, was invaded by flames.

Daisuke ran across amidst the rain of fire.

Eventually, he stood before a door.

There was a slot at the side of the wall. Inside was a jet-black coat and goggles, along with his familiar handgun.

He reached out for them mechanistically.

He put on the black long coat adorned with belts over his suit. He then retrieved a pair of thick gloves from the pocket of the coat and put them over his lacerated hands.

He placed the large goggles that covered over half of his face over his head and extended his hand towards the large automatic handgun.

Green feelers stretched out from his arm and coiled around the handgun. In the barrel of the gun morphed into the shape of the Cleridae's jaws, a bullet spun at high revolution.

Finally, he slowly opened the door.

What welcomed the fully-equipped Daisuke was a hell filled with inferno.

Heat air swept past him down the corridor, scorching the surface of the heat-resistant coat.

What was reflected in his eyes was a pure-white space.

And also, the large number of people in white coats lying on the ground.

At the centre of it all was—.

“Every single one of you tom, dick and harry are nothing but half-hearted.”

The crimson blaze which spread throughout the room.

They all originated from the person which was wrapped in a heat haze that resembled a Great Yama Tiger beetle with fangs of unequal lengths.

“I'll have to pay you back dearly for this debt. Don't you agree, SEPB!”

The youth with a tattoo on his cheek—Sehateno Harukiyo smiled like a

demon.

## Part 6

“Oh?”

Daisuke’s left fist arrowed in onto Harukiyo’s surprised face.

He broke through the wall of fire, instantly closing the distance between them.

With his coat flapping behind him, Daisuke’s arm swung past. The wind pressure produced dispersed the heat haze surrounding the tattooed youth into all directions.

“.....*Guh!*”

However, the one who raised a groan was Daisuke.

Harukiyo moved even swifter than Daisuke who was fused with his Mushi. He avoided the punch by a paper-thin breadth and drove his own fist gushing with flames into Daisuke’s abdomen. An impact like an explosion blasted him away.

Sent flying, Daisuke automatically assumed a falling position and stood up immediately.

When he raised his head, he found himself facing the Great Yama Tiger beetle made of fire with its jaws wide open. His goggles were lit a scarlet red.

*Why am I fighting.....?*

Making to a rapid turn, the friction between the floor and Daisuke’s boots caused sparks to scatter, leaving a semicircle trail on the ground.

“—Ooh?”

Making an instantaneous turn circumventing the Great Yama Tiger beetle, Daisuke used his arm to lock Harukiyo’s neck from behind. He then spun the tattooed youth around and slammed the back of his head into the wall.

The metal alloy wall, centred around where Harukiyo’s head was smashed

into, broke down.

*This guy is also a Mushitsuki..... Why is it that Mushitsuki can only fight amongst themselves.....?*

Daisuke's arm grabbing onto Harukiyo's neck folded with the sound of creaking.

It was not that the wall had broken down.

The wall had been melted red-hot from heat emanating from the tattooed youth. He had grabbed onto Daisuke's arm with his own and freed his neck with a strength unimaginable coming from a flesh and blood body.

*—Rather than help one or two person, you've turned several ten, hundred times the number into Fallen.*

Who was it who said that to him.

"This is my second time asking, isn't it."

The blazing eyes of the demon stared at Daisuke.

"Don't tell me you thought that something like that goggles is enough to hide the auras of lowlifes like us? This is what you call a touching reunion. —No playing dumb this time, okay."

His fist drove into Daisuke's abdomen again, shooting him into the air.

Daisuke's view was dyed crimson.

"Who are you?"

Daisuke was caught in the maws of the Great Yama Tiger beetle. It bit into Daisuke who covered his face with his arms and smashed him through numerous walls of the facility helplessly.

Even as his consciousness felt like it was being held on by a thread from being crashed through walls after wall, he propped up his handgun.

A cannon-like blast which did not sound like it came from a gunshot roared.

The Great Yama Tiger beetle dissipated into nothing.

Daisuke run back through the path in which he was blasted away.

*That's right..... I should have a reason to fight for.....*

Harukiyo was converging the flames with a dauntless smile, once again forming it into the shape of the Great Yama Tiger beetle. Countless fireballs materialised around him and shot for Daisuke in its aim.

Daisuke met the fireballs with bullets of his own.

*"Hah Hah!"*

Harukiyo's dramatically swung fist homed in on Daisuke as he closed the distance. The explosion of the impact rained down embers wildly, leaving a red-hot crater on the ground.

However, Daisuke had jumped in a split second. —His knee crashed into the side of the tattooed youth's face.

Airborne, Harukiyo hurtled into the wall. A ripple of red vaporised the wall in a flash.

*"Kakkou."*

Pointing his handgun ahead, Daisuke named himself.

Starting from the Interrogation Room Harukiyo was in, the whole floor has been turned into ruins. With the walls separating the passageways from the rooms demolished, the entire level was just a wasteland of fire and rubble.

*But, that doesn't matter anymore—.*

Who cares about anything and whatever.

However much he thought about it, he still couldn't do a single thing properly. Everything turns out the way contrary to what he wanted.

*—You do not have to think about anything.*

Someone whispers at him.

It was indeed just so.

So long as he stops thinking..... if he just focuses on defeating the enemy before him, wouldn't that be sufficient? He even felt that that should be his purpose.

If what he recalls causes him pain.

Then, he might as well forget all about the girl which he turned into a Fallen —.

A streak of red light flashed out.

“Oi, look now.”

A chill ran down his back.

It was as if he was like that from the very start, like it was most natural thing in the world. When Daisuke turned around, he met the burning gaze of the demon. Even as a trail of blood trickled from the corner of his lips, he still had a pompous and majestic smile on his face.

“The party’s just started getting exciting, so don’t you go putting on that gloomy face.”

His palm wreathed in flames grasped Daisuke’s face. Daisuke’s chin was lifted up strengthlessly as he stared at the floor with his thoughts at a halt.

“Like this, you won’t even enter my sights. —Didn’t I say that before?”

Harukiyo’s fist dug into his torso. The blow was so strong that it made him felt dizzy.

“.....!”

Daisuke tried to return a blow by pointing his handgun towards him, but he easily dodged it by turning his head to the side. Harukiyo then followed up with a kick to his face.

“What’s with you? Are you done with already? It does feel like you’re weaker than that time we met at Hanashiro Mari’s room.”

Harukiyo chained into a punch at Daisuke’s temple as he was sent flying. The Great Yama Tiger beetle rammed through Daisuke, sinking his body into a wall that had remained standing.

“Or could it be that you’ve used up all your strength just to come here.”

Daisuke immediately got up to counterattack. However, he hit nothing and received a kick in his chest in return.

“—Hah. How lame. Don’t you dare lose to the Mushi over something trivial like that.”

Fissures ran through the wall and it crumbled noisily.

*He’s strong—.*

Daisuke stood up robotically and pointed his handgun. He continuously pulled the trigger, but all the shots were swallowed up by the Great Yama Tiger beetle without exception.

His vision wavered.

Harukiyo’s kick had sent him flying again.

*I’m going to lose—.*

Daisuke’s mindless counterattacks were evaded entirely. The tattooed youth did not even need to use his hands anymore. Even the grin was gone from his face. With his hands in his pocket, he used Daisuke as his kicking board.

*Is this going to bring about the end.....?*

Unable to even feel pain anymore, Daisuke thought in a daze.

*That’s fine by me, it’s not like there’s anybody who’d wish for me to live anyway.....*

He lowered his arms that was blocking the kicks.

“Are you the same as Hanashiro Mari?”

Harukiyo did not stop kicking.

*Hanashiro Mari—.*

Daisuke perked up at hearing that name.

“Do you think everything is hopeless? That you’ve already done all you could? That’s why you have no regrets left? You don’t want to think anymore?”

The youth wrapped in flames bellowed at Daisuke in rage, as though it was Daisuke’s fault that he was winning.

“To not have to think about anything, of course that’s easy! Once you give up, everything’s over and done with! But, you know, that’s just being half-baked! If

you're gonna give up, then don't even bother in the first place! Don't abandon everything just because you've experienced a wee bit of pain! Stop living your life rejecting others! Is that all you're made off? Are you even living to your fullest? Aah? Don't you live half-heartedly for even a single second, for a single fibre of your being!"

As Daisuke yielded himself to the flurry of attacks, he pondered.

*Hanashiro Mari—.*

*Who did that name belonged to?*

"Don't you dare become a Mushitsuki with that half-baked dream of yours if you're gonna give up on it midway."

*Think.*

*Mushitsuki.*

*That's right, Hanashiro Mari was a Mushitsuki.*

She was already departed from this world. A girl who was a Fusion Type Mushitsuki and lived in solitude, similar to Daisuke.

At the same time as he recalled that, he felt his cheek hurt There were countless parts of his body which were supposed to be hurting a lot more, but there was the only part which burned up and felt unbearably painful. The pain was so much so that—his tightly shut eyes were forcefully opened, unminding of his own will.

*"....."*

He blocked the foot that approached his face. Harukiyo's movement came to a sudden stop.

*—Just what in the world are Mushitsuki?*

The girl hitting Daisuke with teary eyes, Ichinokuro Arisu, said so. Earnestly, from the bottom of her heart.

*—I want to know what Mari truly thought. And also, just what are the Mushitsuki.*

Borrowing the words of the youth in front of him, she was thinking about



things to her “fullest”.

Daisuke swung his arm around.

As expected, his attack was avoided and the counter from Harukiyo dislodged his goggles.

“.....Don’t get in my way!”

Holding his ground, Daisuke glared at Harukiyo.

He remembered his own thoughts—and what was it he was fighting for.

Ichinokuro Arisu.

If he was together with her, would also come to know?

If he walked alongside her who was trying to find out what are the Mushitsuki—find out what did Hanashiro Mari thought, would he then understand?

About what are the Mushitsuki.

And why is it that they could only fight between one another.

If he is able to unravel this mystery, would he be able to achieve his objective for fighting all the time up till now?

“This is not the place for me to come to a standstill.”

He swung his left arm for a punch.

But, that was ducked.



“You’ve finally looked up.”

The demon-like smile returned to Harukiyo’s face.

“No can do, I’m gonna stand in your way with all I’ve got.”

The reason for which he has fought so far.

—*So one day, you must recall your dream as well.*

For the sake of the girl with the same dream as him who he exchanged a promise with. A Mushitsuki girl who cried for all the people that she hurt.

Daisuke chose to fight.

And in these days of fighting, he dreamed of the day to come when he can converse with *Fuyuhotaru*.

The two who passed by each other that day.

The tiny dream exchanged between the two.

For a future where the two who shared the same dream can chat with laughter, without conflict nor anything to do with Mushitsuki—.

Until the time comes when the promise between Daisuke and the girl is fulfilled.

When she recalls the same dream as Daisuke of finding a place to belong.

He will make it come true.

None other than Daisuke himself will create such a world to welcome the girl back.

To end the fight between Mushitsuki and create a world where people do not need to hurt others—that is Daisuke’s purpose. That is the one thing he can do for the girl who had entrusted her dream to him with a smile.

“The one who was supposed to make my dream come true, Hanashiro Mari..... You shall take responsibility for the disappearance of the one who was supposedly stronger than me.”

“Like hell I care. If you’re going to get in my way, then I shall crush you.”

The gazes of the two Mushitsuki clashed in close proximity.

Harukiyo's fist struck Daisuke.

However, Daisuke's fist also aimed true at him this time. Scattering embers all around, both of them bent backwards. But, they instantly got face-to-face again and started brawling.

Whenever the Great Yama Tiger beetle raised a roar, a gunshot would ring out to dissipate the flames. When one's face was hit, a blow to the stomach would be returned.

*"Hah hah!"*

Knocked back by each other's blows, a distance was placed between the two. Harukiyo had a demon-like smile, while Daisuke glared at him reticently.

Right at that time.

*"Kakkun!"*

*".....Kakkou-kun....."*

Several presence appeared around them and Daisuke could hear some familiar voices.

The figure of Neiko and Kurisaka Ayuyu in white coats and goggles appeared. They must have been reinforcement sent from the other floors. A total of ten people in white turned up consecutively.

*"Tch, so the small fries are here. What a downer."*

Harukiyo's smile faded.

*"Oi, Kakkou."*

The youth with the aura of a frenzied berserker rapidly settled down. He queried in an easygoing tone as if chatting with an old friend.

*"What is the thing that you said that you must do no matter what just now?"*

Daisuke did not let his guard down. He felt no obligations to answer him honestly, but an image arose in his mind.

It was the teary-eyed Arisu.

When asked what was the thing that he must do no matter what, the first

thing that popped up in his mind was a headache-inducing problem.

“First, I’ll have to apologise to her, I guess……. Don't make me remember something so unpleasant.”

Having heard the mutterings that leaked out from his mouth unconsciously, Harukiyo laughed amusedly.

“Apologise? Oh? You, are going to apologise? You, who trust nobody apart from yourself such that you think you are the strongest, not mention being totally headstrong and obstinate, that you are going to?”

Daisuke thought of retorting at him to mind his own business, but did not as he was mostly spot on.

“I see. That certainly—sounds interesting. More so than settling things here right now.”

Following that, the grinning youth was swallowed up by an irregularly-shaped flame which grew fangs.

The Great Yama Tiger beetle made of fire gaped its mouthpiece and let out a deafening roar.

The wild blaze then blew past Daisuke and rocketed through the facility.

“……!”

After the heat wave have passed, the tattooed youth was gone without a trace.

Daisuke clicked his tongue.

There was not even any vestige of his presence left. With his ability to show up and disappear like a phantom like back at Hanashiro Mari’s hospital room, and his overwhelming strength, it was highly probable that he could escape from here. —To speak nothing of the fact that he purposely let himself be captured, and probably memorised the escape route.

“Yet another troublesome fellow has showed up again…….”

All the strength drained from the knees of the sighing Daisuke.

“*Kakkun!*”

Having long went past the limits of his body, Daisuke collapsed onto the ground without registering Ayuyu's voice.

## Part 7

A full moon hung in the night sky.

Bathed under the moonlight, a green Cleridae descended from the sky.

It landed on the shoulder of a youth.

Kusuriya Daisuke was walking along the long fence of the Ichinokuro residence. Thereupon, a voice came at him from above.

“Yo, *Kakkou*. How’re you feeling?”

With the same voice as yesterday in the same tone.

It was *Kasuou* dressed in her uniform. She landed next to Daisuke.

“The best.”

His voice was heavier than during yesterday.

Also in his uniform, there was however a plaster on his cheek. The majority of his injuries were healed by Neiko’s ability, but due to the nature of only healing the areas reachable by her song, the parts completely burnt away or vaporised were unrestored. Even with the protection of his coat, his body was strewn with burns.

—*You shall be re-acknowledged as Blaze Class Rank 1.*

Despite his failure to suppress him, they must have recognised his contributions towards the repelling of Sehateno Harukiyo. Miguruma Yaeko had announced that while looking down on the injured Daisuke. Being in a weakened state due to his injury and fatigue, Daisuke did not manage to take in the meaning of that sentence for a moment—.

“Seems like both your body and spirit are in tatters. Want me to comfort you? I’ll be gentle.”

“I reject with all my heart and soul.”

“.....I’m sure of it now. As expected, you definitely hate me, right.”

Ignoring the light banter from *Kasuou*, Daisuke approached the gate. He heard a voice mixed with laughter from behind saying, ‘Do your best to get that kid to nurse you and perk up’.

He felt heavy-hearted.

Approaching the gate, Daisuke heave a sigh, a habit he has adopted since coming to Akamaki City.

If he needed nursing, then Kujou Takako would have been more suitable for the job.

And if he wanted to perk up, that should be left to Saionji Ena.

However, as for the girl who lived in this mansion.....

No, rather.....

He did not know what expression should he face Arisu with.

Of course, he knew that needed to apologise.

However, Daisuke had given up on the matter regarding Hanashiro Mari, even if it was momentarily.

At the same time, that of his dream as well.

I—.

When he opened the gate, he found the girl standing there dauntingly.

With the exact same appearance, same look of anger on her face, she looked down at him.

“Stupid Daisuke.”

*This girl—.*

A smile formed on his face unconsciously.

*Arisu truly is—.*

For now, Daisuke just spoke what was on his mind.

He felt as if his shoulders were lightened a little, if only just slightly.



“Yea, you’re right, I’m an idiot.”

Looking at the mumbling Daisuke, Arisu knotted her eyebrows. She seemed baffled to see him being honest for once.

“It’s my bad. I wholly apologise for speaking bad about Hanashiro Mari. So, won’t you repair your mood already.”

Unlike yesterday, he intended to ask for forgiveness candidly.

However, the expression of anger on her face all the more deepened.

“.....? W-what is it, is there still something else?”

“Will you not know unless I spell it out for you? That is why you are such an idiot.”

Arisu sighed with a look of exasperation.

She thoughtlessly hit Daisuke’s chest with her small fist huffily.

“Of course there’s that matter about Mari also, but..... if you ever say something like that again, I’ll seriously get angry.”

“Aren’t you angry enough as it is already. Just what are you referring to?”

“Don’t say things like you will die so easily.”

Arisu glared straight ahead at Daisuke solemnly.

Daisuke widened his eyes.

*—Hanashiro Mari had a close friend who would seriously get angry on her behalf.*

He felt like he become one step closer to being like her.

“.....What the heck, so it was just something like that.”

Muttering softly, Daisuke brushed off her hand.

Arisu raised her eyebrows.

“Something like that, you say?”

“It’s merely something like that. ....I don’t have the least bit of intention of dying. Even if I was to leap into flames right now, I still wouldn’t die.”

From the bottom of his heart, he said earnestly.

Looking down at Daisuke who spoke levelly as he took off his shoes, Arisu raised a groan.

“You really just can’t be honest with yourself..... If you’re going to live your life so fast-paced, you can just go be an old man.”

“If I were to be an old man, then the same-age you are bound to be an old woman.”

“A young beauty like myself would never age. —Hm? Are you injured? What happened?”

Circling before Daisuke who walked down the corridor, Arisu stared into his face.

At the question, he recollected the happenings over these past few days.

He was slapped by Arisu.

A witch with a chain-like smile appeared before him.

He learned about the existence of *Sanbikime* and its subsequent demise.

He fought against a demon which manipulates flames.

He gave up on his dream—and recalled it again.

All of which were related to the matter about Hanashiro Mari. All trifle matters which Ichinokuro Arisu did not need to know about.

A falling silver light appeared in the edge of his vision.

It was the silver Morpho butterfly.

The continuation of Hanashiro Mari’s dream.

“Nevermind. It was nothing much.”

Daisuke said as he smiled gently.

—*See you tomorrow!*

Looking back at him oddly, Arisu thought that his smile overlapped with that of Mari.

To be continued

# Afterword

Hello, this is Iwai Kyouhei.

This series, 'Mushi Uta bug', has successfully reached its second release as well.

It feels like the cast has finally been assembled. Perhaps, you could say that we have reached the turning point.

The story shall now progress gradually towards the conclusion of the people related to the girl known as Hanashiro Mari, and to the beginning of the main series.

Looking through the current volume, it feels like the protagonist was meeting new characters throughout the book. Let's put aside the voices saying, 'Oi oi, aren't you the one who wrote this'.

This could be said to be one of the patterns common to a collection of short stories. However, there is no doubt that this is also the result of the full display of the author's preference of introducing new characters. When one thinks about stories of adolescence, one would naturally imagine encountering a cycle of meetings and departures. Let's not forget reunions.

In this volume, the theme of "dreams" acts as a magnet, drawing the various characters to one another, and likewise, repelling each other as well.

Furthermore, this magnetism can come in the form of love, duty, title, and birth amongst others.

I wonder what is it that ties you the reader to those around you?

Also.

To Ruroo-sama who has to review the depiction of the characters as they

change. I deeply apologise. Please accept your fate of having to team up with such a troublesome writer. Añjali Mudrā.

For the smooth operation of having a serialised series, I dedicate my thanks to Onai-san and Yamaguchi-san for the management of the schedule and their guidance, as well as to the rest of the editorial department for their endless help.

I have also caused great trouble for Ruroo-sama who have drawn for us these illustrations.

Thank you very much. Please continue to look after me in the future as well.

A year has passed since the serialisation of the bug series has begun.

I have also received countless messages from readers who started reading the main series with the serialisation as an impetus. This makes me overjoyed.

I hope to meet you all again in the next volume.

Iwai Kyouhei

# Notes